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JANUARY 2009

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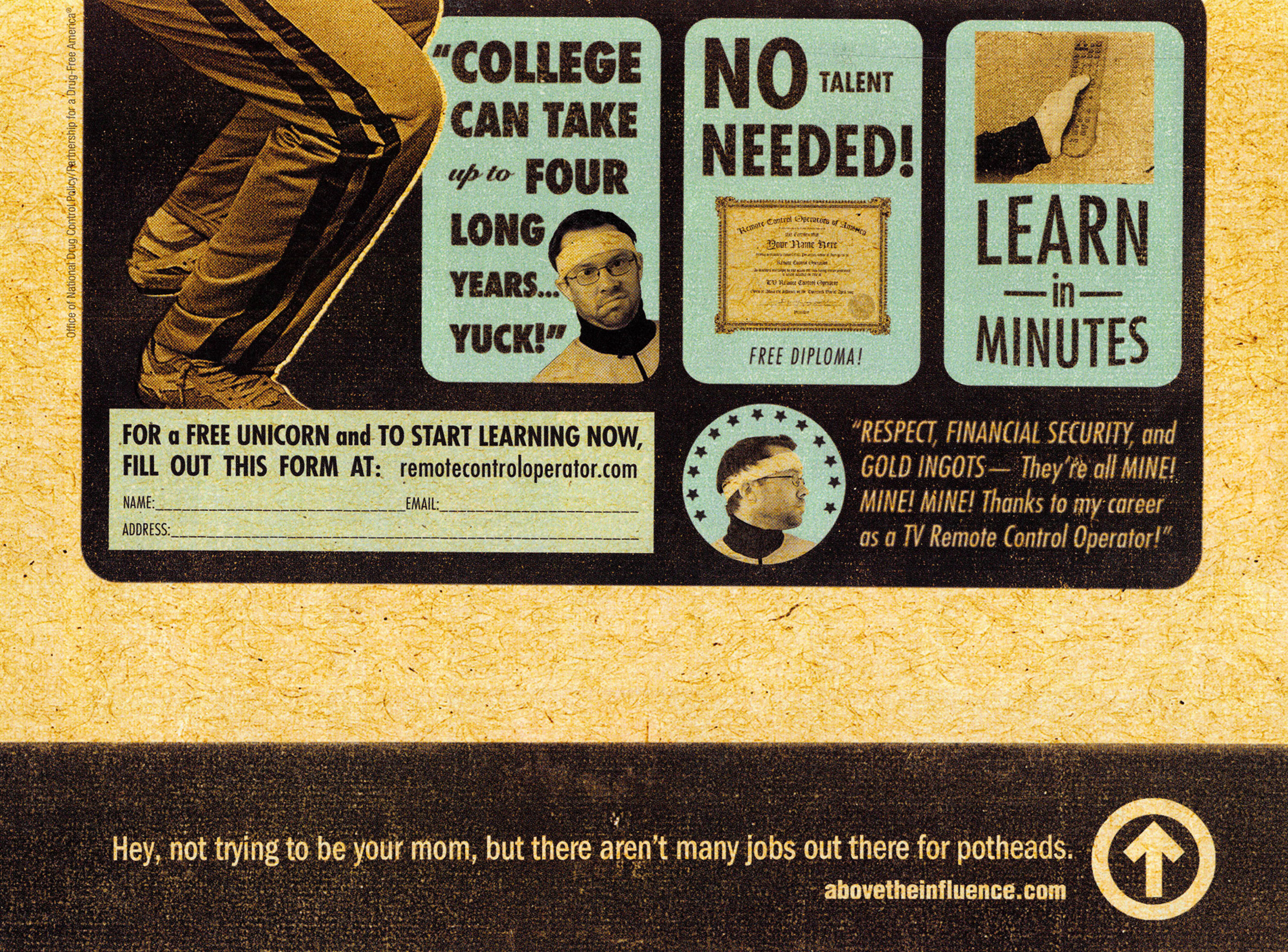
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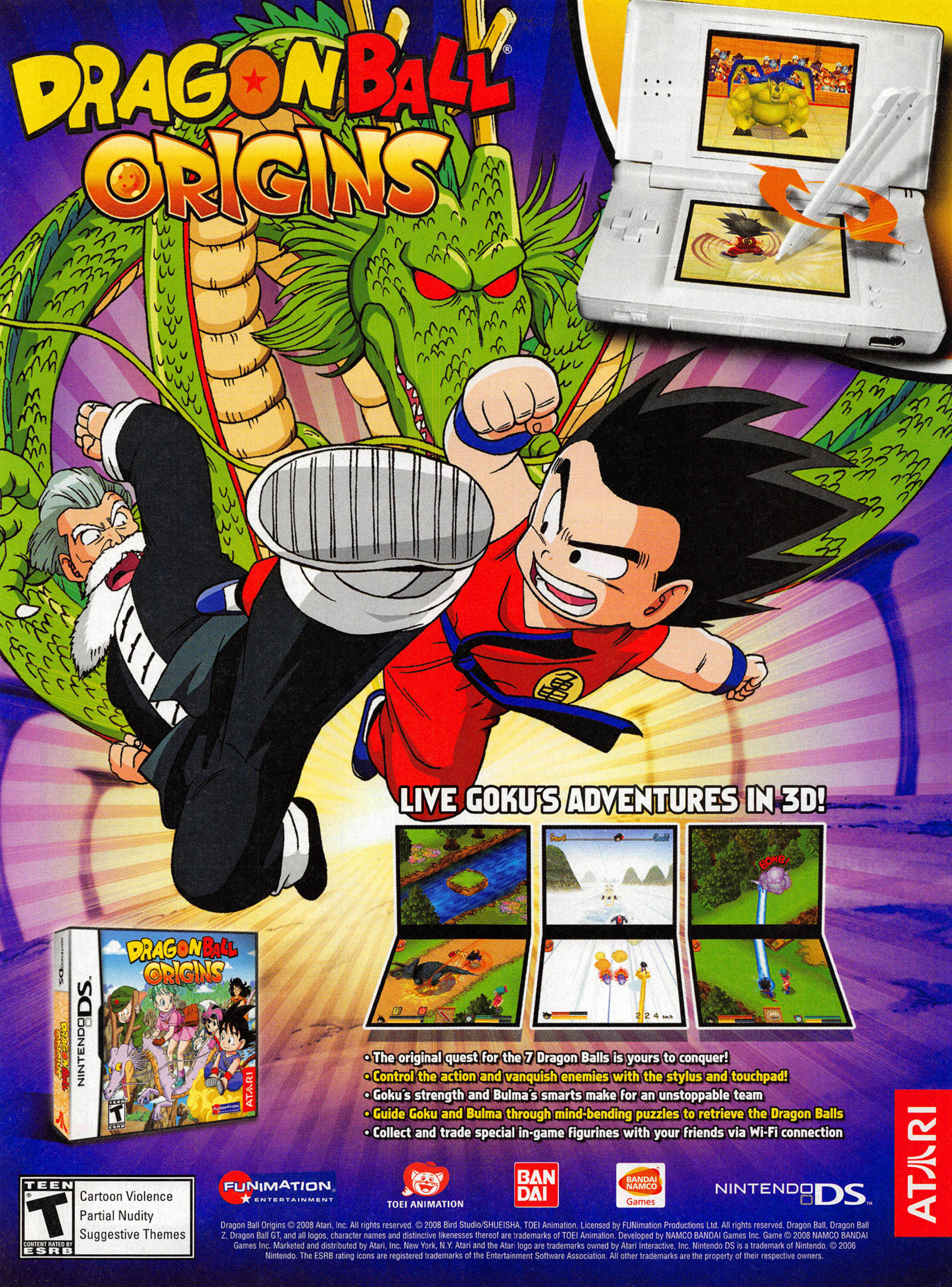
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Cartoon Violence
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes

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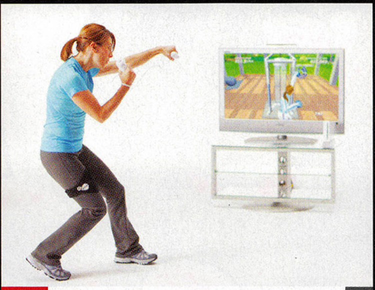

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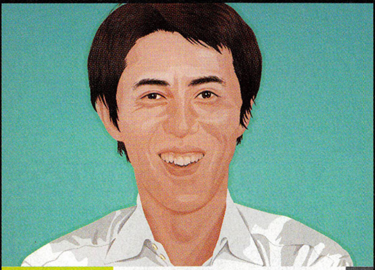

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DS = NINTENDO DS
NES = NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWare

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Pulse

Back Online for '09

Chris Slate

This issue we kick off 2009 with a massive 40-page preview of the new year's biggest Wii and DS games, starting on page 26. But before we get to that, I have an announcement! I'm happy to say that we're leaving our lame placeholder website firmly behind in 2008. That's right; we've finally got a new site! In fact, you can check it out right now at www.nintendopower.com. It's nothing superfancy—we'll likely tinker with it more at some point—but it has a cool feature that we're all pretty excited about. From now on, you'll be able to get a sneak peek at each month's biggest stories just as the issues start heading out to subscribers. You can download high-res sample pages from features, previews, news stories and more, or check out the Contents pages to see a list of everything that's in the new issue. We hope you find the early look exciting, and check back every month for your first taste of the issue. Be sure to let us know how you like it!

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

2 FREE POSTERS! POKÉMON RANGER: SHADOWS OF ALMIA & CASTLEVANIA
NINTENDO POWER
YEAR-END REVIEWS BLOWOUT!
We Rate the Holiday Season's Biggest Games
TOKYO GAME SHOW REPORT!
We play Kingdom Hearts DS, Phantasy Star 0, Tenchu 4, MadWorld, and more!

V236 HOLIDAY 2008

Chris Slate here, back once again to answer your letters between breaking New Year's resolutions. But first, this month's special request: tell me your favorite gaming moment of 2008 and how it impacted you. Send your stories to the address on p. 8, and we'll print the best ones!

LETTERS

IS LOVE IN THE AIR?

I saw an ad in your magazine for a game called Princess Debut, and it got me thinking. Games have always had romance subplots, but since most games are for guys, they usually deal with winning the affections of girls. However, more games that include girl-oriented romances, like Harvest Moon for Girls and Princess Debut, are rearing their pretty little heads. Could this be the start of a new trend? The DS seems like the perfect system for girl-oriented dating sims or visual novels like they have in Japan. I'd like to win the affection of a few dozen bodyguards, or ninja, or princes. **—COREY**

As the DS audience continues to grow, publishers are willing to take risks with new game types. If titles like Princess Debut do well, I'm sure we'll see many more similar titles come to our shores.

Could Princess Debut signal more girls' romance games to come? Corey hopes so!

KEEP THE LITE ON

I can't wait to get my hands on the Nintendo DSi! Two cameras, web browsing, downloadable software, and more—that sounds like a lot for one handheld system. But the one thing I don't like is that it doesn't have a Game Boy Advance slot. I've enjoyed playing old GBA games on my DS since I don't have a GBA anymore. And what will happen to Guitar Hero: On Tour and the Rumble Pak, both of which use that slot? **—SAM F.**

Nintendo DSi won't be compatible with GBA games or the peripherals that you mentioned, which is one reason why my DS Lite will continue to see a lot of action.

READ A GOOD GAME

One of my favorite pastimes is reading a good book, but this wasn't always the case. When I was very young, I hated reading for practice. But I started playing games like Super Mario 64 and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, and in order to understand the stories and what I needed to do, I had to read a lot of text. This made me become a good reader, and helped me to learn to enjoy reading. So, I'd like to thank Nintendo not only for fun games, but in helping me to build a very important life skill, as well! **—AUSTIN B.**

Great story, Austin! I wonder why we don't hear stories like yours on the evening news?

Mega Man 9 is quite possibly the hardest game I have ever played (besides Kid Icarus). I was just wondering how you beat the game, what you did to beat the undying frustration that boils inside you as you play, and how many Wii remotes you went through after repeatedly throwing them against the wall after you died over and over? **—SNOWIEHAM**

Good questions! Let me bring in our Mega Man expert, Chris Hoffman, to answer them: "First I cried a little bit. (Our tears help Keiji Inafune maintain his youthful good looks.) Then I 'borrowed' Steve's controller, just in case. Then I meditated to reach a state in which I wouldn't mind dying a lot, and reminded myself that I could mine for bolts to buy power-ups if I really got stuck."

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

If the success of games like Mega Man 9 and Wario Land: Shake It! are any indication, old-school 2-D games are back in style. But what about old-school 3-D games? Whenever a new game comes out with N64-like visuals, it's usually panned for having terrible graphics while new 8-bit-style titles get accolades. Am I the only one that feels nostalgic for old 3-D games? **—DAN REYES PRIME**

I don't think as many people pine for those early 3-D experiences because those kinds of games are still made in huge numbers, just with better graphics and more features. On the other hand, many types of 8-bit games have been entirely left behind.

CHUCKED FROM BRAWL

If Chuck Norris was in Super Smash Bros. Brawl, the game would be so awesome that no one could play it except Chuck Norris. All his moves would be roundhouse kicks, and he would be too easy to unlock because he would unlock himself automatically. **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

Makes sense to me.

TRICK OR TETRIS

This Halloween, four of my friends and I walked around our neighborhood as Tetris pieces! Many people stopped to compliment us and take out picture. **—STEVEN A.**

Nice! How long did you have to wait before a long piece dropped?

With cool Tetris costumes like those, Steven and his pals must have made out like sweet-toothed candy bandits.

RIGHT ON, SISTER

The November and December issues of Nintendo Power included some letters about being a Nintendo fangirl and ignoring the idiot boys who tease you. I have to admit, I'm a shy Nintendo fangirl myself. I know that boys will tease me and that my friends will think I'm a nerd, so I keep a lot of things to myself. But after reading letters from three specific people—Meta Knight in Vol. 234, and Rebecca L. and A Link Past His Prime in Vol. 235—I've come to realize that girls like me can do whatever we feel like, and that no boy or girl can stop us.

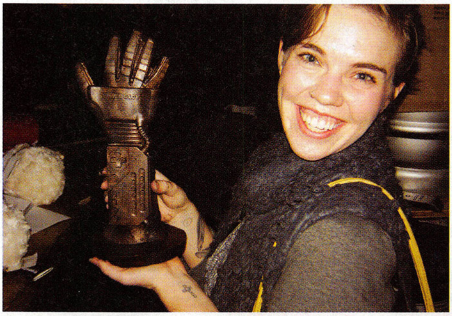
So I'd like to give a personal thank-you to those three people who really helped boost my self-esteem without knowing it. I now know that there are hundreds of thousands of girls like me who play video games day and night. You three are great. Seriously. **—SAMANTHA B.**

Letters like this warm my heart. Keep spreading the love, people!

MASTER HAND

Meet my soon-to-be-wife, Quinn, a visual artist who just made my lifetime with her Power Glove sculpting. I hope this blows your minds as much as it did mine. **—KELLER**

Nice handiwork, Quinn! C'mon everybody: give her a hand! Okay, I'll stop.



Keller's fiancée, Quinn, knows how to charm her Nintendomaniac.

ARE YOU GAME ENOUGH?

I was wondering what a person has to do in order to be considered a hardcore gamer. Just because I don't camp out at the store the day that a new Zelda game comes out, does that mean I'm not a hardcore gamer? **—AUSTIN S.**

I consider a hardcore gamer to simply be anyone who puts a lot of time and passion into games, no matter what kind they play.

LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP

Why are there often large discrepancies between previews and reviews? For example, the Vol. 234 preview of SPRay tells us that the game's "unique approach certainly holds promise." However, the following month's review compares the game to "regurgitating a lung" while scoring it a dismal 3.0. Certainly the game didn't change that much over the course of a month. **—JET PILOT**

For previews, we sometimes have limited access—or no access at all—to a playable version of a game. Or the version we play is still in development and has a chance of getting better before release. We're not going to slag a work-in-progress when it could end up being great, and we try not to overhype a game that's largely untested. We genuinely thought the premise behind SPRay was interesting, but you can't ever really judge a game until you've played through a final version.

> I believe that a system should be judged by the quality of its games, which is why I choose the N64 as the best console of all time. Nowhere else will you find gems like Super Mario 64, Super Smash Bros., Paper Mario, Star Fox 64, GoldenEye, Banjo-Kazooie, Majora's Mask, and my personal favorite, Ocarina of Time. The list goes on and on. Oh, and cartridges rock!
>
> —ZACH BONEBRAKE

NINTENDO64

WHAT IS YOUR ALL-TIME FAVORITE NINTENDO SYSTEM?

The Super NES is my all-time favorite console. "Why," you ask? Three letters: R, P, and G. That system had some amazing role-playing games, the likes of which haven't been seen since. Chrono Trigger, Super Mario RPG, EarthBound, Secret of Evermore, and Final Fantasy IV and VI are just the first few that come to mind. Let's see these classics and their brethren given new life in 3-D on Wii. PLEASE?! **—JIMMY T.**

I'm going to choose Wii because it continues to produce amazing new iterations of classic Nintendo franchises. And with an ever-expanding lineup of Wii channels, the console offers a lot of things for a fair price. It's also backwards-compatible in the truest sense; it plays GameCube games, and for a small fee, you can choose from an expanding lineup of classic titles from a variety of systems. And with the introduction of WiiWare, you'd be hard-pressed to ever accuse Wii of lacking in game selection. **—JEREMY KING**

I bet you won't hear this one picked too much, but my favorite system is Game Boy Color. It was my first game system, and I loved it right from the start! Sure, the graphics aren't that great, but it had plenty of fun games. To this day I still play Donkey Kong Country on my GBC! **—MIK**

This may sound weird, but my favorite Nintendo system of all time was Nintendo's only commercial failure: the Virtual Boy. Although the system had a high price and a very limited number of games, it was pure entertainment. Looking through the eye holes, some games felt like true 3-D worlds while others fell a bit short, but all together the game library was, in my opinion, really good—well, except for Waterworld. If at all possible, I'd love to see Virtual Boy games appear on Wii's Virtual Console. If you could re-create the 3-D gameplay using glasses of some sort, it would be awesome.

—MR. GAME AND WATCH

It's certainly tempting to pick Wii as my favorite system, but I have to give credit where credit is due and go with the Nintendo Entertainment System. Before I started playing the NES in 1989, I'm not sure that I even knew what video games were. NES opened a whole new world for me, a world where anything can happen.

—(NO NAME GIVEN)

You turn it on and listen to that oh-so-special buzz, it boots up as the cube rolls around the screen with that impeccable chime, and suddenly you know you're in for one good experience. Some may consider the GameCube to be one of Nintendo's worst systems, but I believe it to be the best. From Pikmin to Super Smash Bros. Melee, You can't beat GameCube's impressive lineup. With the right balance of graphics, games, great controller design, and one of the best games ever (SSBM), you can't deny the immersive fun of the GameCube.

—MARK B.

My favorite system is the Nintendo DS. It has many cool features, such as the mic and the touch screen, that have allowed entire new genres of games to be created. Also, while the DS Lite wasn't marketed as a tough system, mine has survived coin scratches and being dropped down a steep staircase.

—BOMBERMAN9

Thanks to everyone who sent in their picks! For the record, N64 beat out all other systems combined by about two to one. Go, 64-bit!

PLEASE WRITE US

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Or via carrier pigeon at

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Understand that the magazine staff is separate from Nintendo; we don't make the games.

Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

NINTENDO POWER

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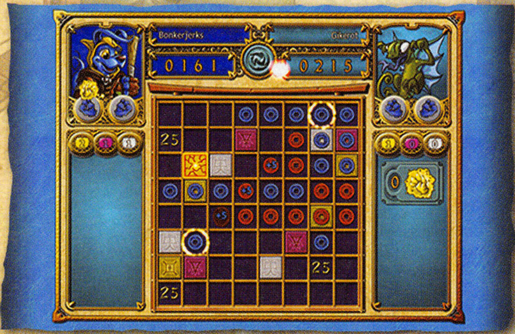
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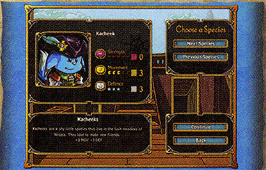
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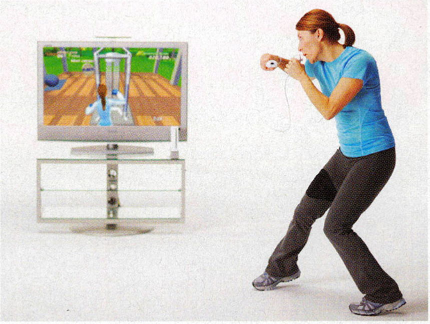
NASCAR TAKES A DIFFERENT TRACK

SONIC GETS ANIMATED

RUMBLE RETURNS

Wii Re-Fitted

Electronic Arts leverages its sports-game expertise to develop EA Sports Active, a Wii-exclusive daily trainer due this spring.

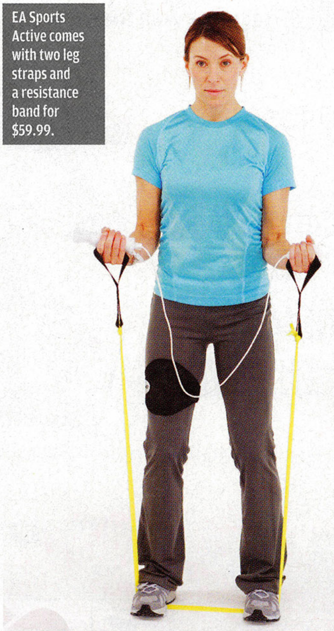


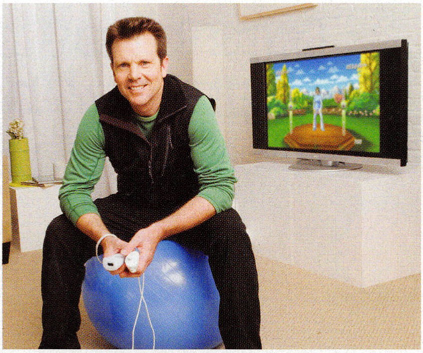
You make real-life-mirroring gestures to pass, kick, and tackle in EA's Madden NFL for Wii, but the game won't likely make you break out into a sweat like running after Reggie Bush would for real. EA's next sports title, however, is designed to give you a physical workout. Following the Wii Fit formula of offering a regular daily exercise routine, EA Sports Active gives you a custom 20-minute set of activities based on your fitness goals. As you advance through the title's 30 Day Challenge, the exercises will become more demanding to increase your conditioning and help you burn off more calories.

EA Sports Active is compatible with Wii Fit's Wii Balance Board, but the game's primary means for reading your upper-and-lower-body movement is a leg strap and a resistance band (to simulate weight training), which work in collaboration with the Wii remote and nunchuk. The title will be shipped with two leg straps to encourage you to partner up with a friend. Two-person sessions are presented via split screen, with each exerciser getting feedback and a progress report.

One of the hallmarks of EA's sports titles is a commitment to realism. The real-life experience that EA Sports Active intends to give you is that of having a personal trainer at your disposal. Working with your trainer, you'll single out exercises that you like, and detail your exercising goals to help the software design each day's workout. EA is working with well-known fitness experts, such as Oprah's personal trainer Bob Greene, to ensure that the advice and encouragement you receive is in line with the training you'd get at your local gym. **—GEORGE S.**

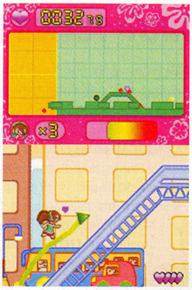
EA Sports Active comes with two leg straps and a resistance band for $59.99.

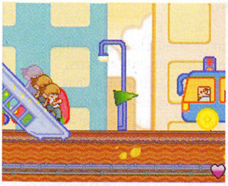




The Thrill of the Chase

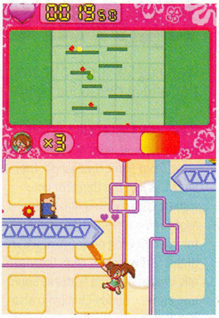
This February, it's a race to a date in Atari's **The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity** on the DS.

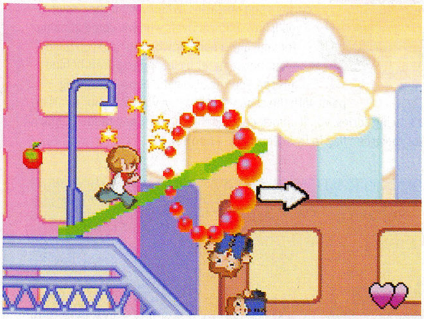




One day a boy named Felix and a girl named Felicity fatefully bump into one another. It's love at first sight, and they decide to go on a date at the beach the next day. But reaching that beach becomes more of an adventure than the lovebirds realize, so it's up to you to get them there in The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity.

You can select either Felix or Felicity as you make your way through 40 levels in this platformer. In a nod to Super Mario Bros. 2, both characters have individual advantages and disadvantages: Felicity can jump high but can't run as quickly, whereas Felix is just the opposite. You'll need both running and jumping skills to collect objects (including coins, flowers, and hearts—all of which you'll want for your date) while avoiding the date-ruining—and game-ending—wall of rain chasing after you. To make things easier, you can use Rush lines to make your own roads, à la Kirby: Canvas Curse, by drawing them with the stylus. The Rush meter is limited, however, so you'll have to replenish it by collecting fruit (if this sounds clichéd, don't worry—it's meant to; the characters are very much aware they're in a video game). —JUSTIN C.

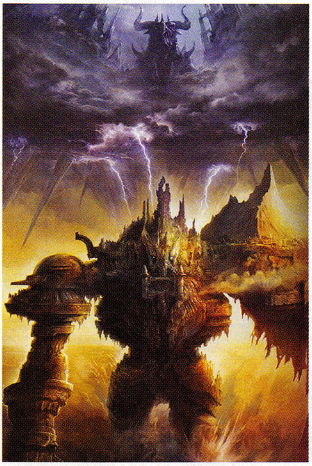




NEWS FROM JAPAN

Clash of the Titans

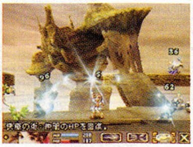
The heroes of Square Enix's **Blood of Bahamut** are standing on the shoulders of giants. And the giants want them off, now.

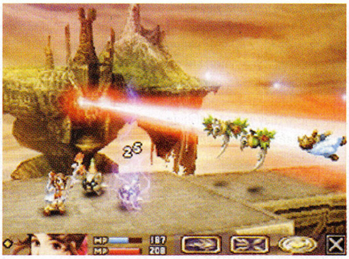


One of the perils of making your home atop sleeping behemoths is that one day they're going to wake up and try to kill you. Having nowhere to retreat, the heroes of Blood of Bahamut have little choice but to defy the odds and fight back in 130 giant-slaying missions.

You can choose from seven characters and team up with as many as three other players on each of the boss-focused missions. The game is real-time action, but the developers at Think & Feel (who last created Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings) caution that the keys to victory are preparation and tactics rather than reflexes—you'll need to discover and attack each of the behemoths' weak points with the right weapons and spells to take them apart, piece by massive piece.

More detail about Blood of Bahamut will be revealed at January's Jump Festa in Japan, and hopefully news of a North American release will follow soon after. —CASEY L.

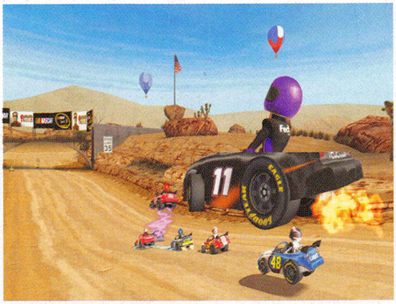




Nitro-Fueled Funny Cars

Electronic Arts veers off the racing-sim path to offer the on-and-off-road rubber-burning antics of **NASCAR Karts** for Wii, developed by EA Tiburon.

EA's NASCAR series provides realism. Its Need for Speed franchise provides thrills. Now it's aiming for pure fun with NASCAR Karts. Fourteen circuit pros (such as Jimmie Johnson, Jeff Gordon, Tony Stewart, and Dale Earnhardt, Jr.) race alongside 10 custom-built characters in 12-car fields. The game's 24 courses are set in and around famed NASCAR haunts Daytona, Talladega, Dover, and Bristol. They include traditional tracks, freeways, canyons, deserts, and back roads, and are packed with tight corners and obstacles. When you hit the circuit, you'll have natural rivals who will come gunning for you, and a partner who will help you build your boost meter by letting you draft behind his car. You can also get a boost by trading paint with the competition. When you beat your rivals in 13 racing series, you'll unlock new courses, drivers, and modes. Look for the green flag to fly in February. —**GEORGE S.**



Beware of 'Hog

Werehog Sonic can't be stopped. He's tearing it up in animation and in the action-figure aisle.

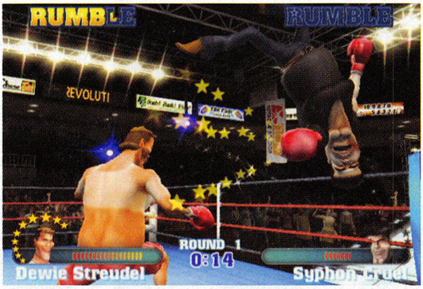
If you can't get enough of Sonic the Hedgehog in his burly Werehog guise from Sonic Unleashed, then Sega has just the thing for you: a short CG-animated film titled *Night of the Werehog*. Available for your viewing pleasure at www.nightofthewerehog.com, the visually impressive film features Sonic and his new buddy Chip (who also debuted in Sonic Unleashed) visiting a mansion inhabited by ghosts who get their kicks by scaring the pants off anyone who enters their domain. Things don't exactly go the ghosts' way, however; when the full moon rises and Sonic goes all Werehog on the ghouls, they're forced to call upon dark powers, and a knock-down, drag-out fight ensues. You can further sate your need for all things hedgehog by picking up Jazwares's Sonic the Werehog action figure, which is available exclusively at Toys "R" Us and carries a $9.99 price tag. —**CHRIS H.**

Are You Ready?

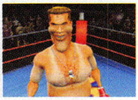
With **Ready 2 Rumble Revolution**, Atari brings the arcade-style boxing series to Wii.

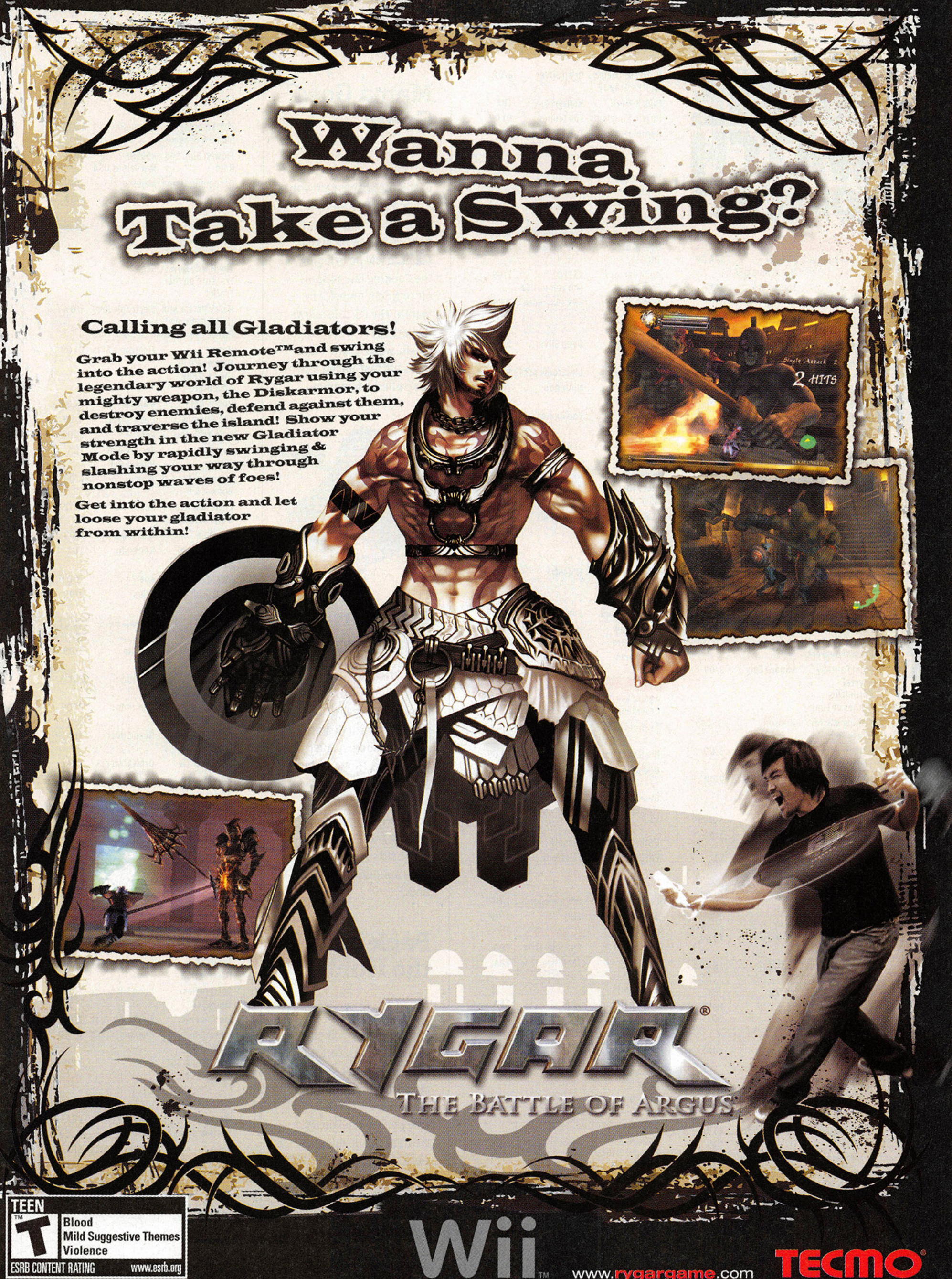
After the release of Super Punch-Out!!, there was an arcade-boxing-game gap that was filled nicely by Midway's Ready 2 Rumble Boxing. A Ready 2 Rumble sequel was released a year later, but the series subsequently dropped off the face of the earth—until Atari announced they were publishing Ready 2 Rumble Revolution on Wii.

Developed by AKI (perhaps best known for WWF No Mercy on N64), Ready 2 Rumble Revolution has easy-to-learn gesture-controlled fighting mechanics and minigames, and a fairly deep create-a-character mode. Or you can select one of 20 lampooned celebrities, including satirical versions of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Shaun White, and David Hasselhoff. Of course, the entire game is completely over-the-top: for example, once the Rumble meter is filled, you can unleash devastating wrestling, kung fu, or other martial-arts moves on your opponent. As Michael Buffer, the voice of the franchise, would say: "Let's get ready to rumble!" —**JUSTIN C.**



Kaiser Kong





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GAME WATCH FORECAST

Wii		
Arc Rise Fantasia	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	SPR 09
Brave: A Warrior's Tale	SouthPeak	2/09
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	TBA
The Conduit	Sega	SPR 09
Coraline	D3Publisher	1/09
Cursed Mountain	Deep Silver	2009
Dance Dance Revolution: Disney Grooves	Konami	2009
Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop	Capcom	2/09
Deadly Creatures	THQ	2/09
The Destiny of Zorro	Pronto Games	TBA
DiRT 2*	Codemasters	2009
Disaster: Day of Crisis	Nintendo	TBA
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	3/09
EA Sports Active	Electronic Arts	SPR 09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	TBA
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	Square Enix	3/09
Fishing Master: World Tour	Hudson	Q1 09
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	3/09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Help Wanted	Hudson	SUM 09
The House of the Dead: Overkill	Sega	2/09
Indoor Sports	Konami	TBA
Klonoa	Namco Bandai	Q2 09
Little King's Story	XSEED	Q1 09
MadWorld	Sega	3/09
Major Minor's Majestic March	Majesco	Q1 09
Marble Saga: Kororinpa	Hudson	SPR 09
Muramasa: The Demon Blade	XSEED	2nd Half 09
NASCAR Karts	Electronic Arts	2/09
No More Heroes: Desperate Struggle	TBA	2010
Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers	D3Publisher	Q1 09
Overlord Dark Legend	Codemasters	Q1-Q2 09
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
Pirates vs. Ninjas Dodgeball	Gamecock	1/09
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	Konami	2009
Professor Heinz Wolff's Gravity	Deep Silver	2/09
Punch-Out!!	Nintendo	TBA
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Pyroblazer	TBA	TBA
Ready 2 Rumble Revolution	Atari	Q1 09
Real Heroes: Firefighter	Conspiracy	Q2 09
Roogoo Twisted Towers	SouthPeak	Q1 09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Rune Factory Frontier	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	2/09
Samurai Shodown Anthology	SNK Playmore	Q4 08
Secret Files: Tunguska	Deep Silver	1/09
SimAnimals	Electronic Arts	1/09
Sin and Punishment 2	Nintendo	2009
Skate City Heroes	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Sonic and the Black Knight	Sega	2009
Spyborgs	Capcom	2009
Story Hour Adventures	Zoo Games	2008
Story Hour Fairy Tales	Zoo Games	2008
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*	Ubisoft	9/09
Tenchu 4: Shadow Assassins	Ubisoft	Q1 09
Trivial Pursuit	Electronic Arts	Q2 09
We Ski and Snowboard	Namco Bandai	3/09
Wii Sports Resort	Nintendo	SPR 09
NINTENDO DS		
Again: Eye of Providence	Tecmo	SPR 09
Avalon Code	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	3/09
Big Bang Mini	SouthPeak	Q1 09
Blood Bowl	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Blue Dragon Plus	Ignition	3/09
Boing! Docomodake	Ignition	3/09
Broken Sword	Ubisoft	2/09
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	TBA
The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity	Atari	2/09
Coraline	D3Publisher	1/09
de Blob	THQ	3/09
DiRT 2*	Codemasters	2009
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	TBA
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	Square Enix	2/09
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Reverie	Square Enix	TBA
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Chain Reaction	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Critical Mass	Deep Silver	10/09
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Proving Grounds	Deep Silver	2009
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	Square Enix	3/09
Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon	Nintendo	1st Half 09
Flower, Sun, and Rain	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	3/09
Gardening Mama	Majesco	3/09
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	3/09
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	Rockstar	Q2 09
The Hardy Boys: Treasure on the Tracks	Sega	SPR 09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure	Electronic Arts	Q1 09
Hot 'n' Cold	Majesco	Q1 09
The Humans	Deep Silver	4/09
Infinite Space	Sega	2009
Last King of Africa	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	Atlus	2/09
Little Magician's Magic Adventure	Konami	Q1 09
Lux-Pain	Ignition	3/09
Mario & Luigi RPG 3*	Nintendo	TBA
Monsters Racers	Koei	2009
My World, My Way	Atlus	2/09
Overlord Minions	Codemasters	Q1-Q2 09
Peggle: Dual Shot	PopCap	3/09
Personal Trainer: Math	Nintendo	2009
Personal Trainer: Walking	Nintendo	2009
Pet Vet Down Under	Deep Silver	TBA
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
Professor Heinz Wolff's Gravity	Deep Silver	2/09
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	D3Publisher	2/09
Rhythm Heaven	Nintendo	1st Half 09
Roogoo Tower Attack	SouthPeak	Q1 09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Sands of Destruction	Sega	SUM 09
Secret Files: Tunguska	Deep Silver	1/09
SimAnimals	Electronic Arts	2/09
Suikoden: Tierkreis	Konami	Q1 09
TrackMania DS	Atlus	3/09
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume	Square Enix	3/09
Warlords DS	Strategy First	TBA
A Witch's Tale	NIS America	Q1 09
Zubo	Electronic Arts	SPR 09

BITS OF TID

Mama Goes Green

Majesco announces Gardening Mama.

Last issue we brought you a glimpse of Gardening Mama in our TGS report. Now we can confirm that Majesco will be bringing the Cooking Mama spin-off to North America in March. The DS title allows players to till soil, plant seeds, water plants, and more via fast-paced touch-controlled minigames.

Made in Nippon

Dood! Nippon Ichi is making Wii games!

After showing the DS some love with Disgaea DS and Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure, Nippon Ichi Software (NIS) recently announced that the company is going to start making games for Wii in 2009. No specific titles were announced at press time.

Back in the Hunt

Aksys Games's Jake Hunter returns?

File this one as a likely suspect: apparently Aksys Games's graphic-text adventure Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles may get a sequel on DS. We hear the developers were paying attention to the complaints about the first game and they'll be addressed in a big way the second time around.

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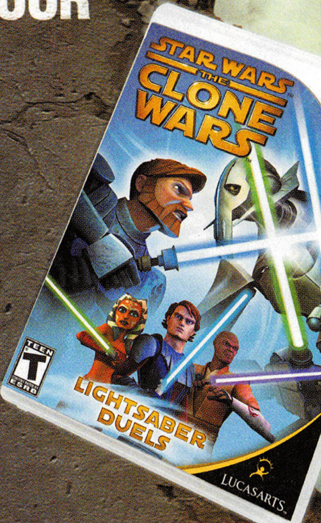
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Wii Channels

You'll find a diverse set of previews as well as an inside look at one of the biggest names in WiiWare in this month's Channels section.

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WIIWARE PREVIEW
Pit Crew Panic!

WIIWARE PREVIEW
Evasive Space

WIIWARE PREVIEW
Snowboard Riot

WIIWARE FEATURE
Behind the scenes of Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People

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- ALIEN CRUSH RETURNS
- ART STYLE: ROTOHEX
- BRAIN CHALLENGE
- HOME SWEET HOME
- STRONG BAD EPISODE 3: BADDEST OF THE BANDS
- STRONG BAD EPISODE 4: DANGERESQUE 3
- TARGET TOSS PRO: BAGS
- YUMMY YUMMY COOKING JAM

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VIRTUAL CONSOLE REVIEWS

- EARTHWORM JIM
- FORGOTTEN WORLDS
- MEGA MAN 3
- SPACE HARRIER
- SPACE INVADERS: THE ORIGINAL GAME

Grease Is the Word

Toilets? Flowerbeds? An aircraft carrier?? You'll fix them all in Hudson's quirky new WiiWare title **Pit Crew Panic!**

WiiWare games don't get much wackier than Pit Crew Panic! from Hudson. Even though you're in control of a pit crew, you don't spend your time working on cars in the heat of a race—you spend it repairing an assortment of "whatsits" that range from wedding cakes to the Golden Gate Bridge.

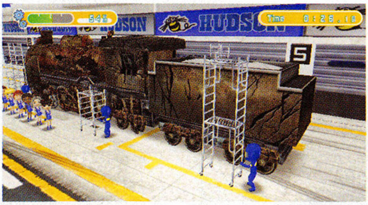
"It all started with a dirty toilet at my place," reminisces director Yasuhiro Kido. "It was so dirty that it was taking me a couple of hours to clean it. In the middle of that, a picture of pit crews working popped into my head, and I thought, 'It would take them mere seconds to clean this up....'"

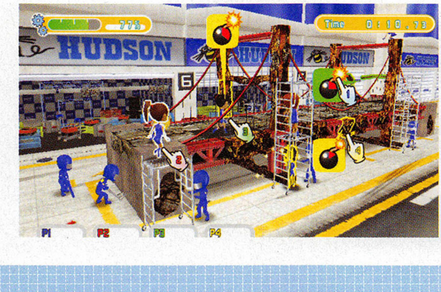
Don't worry about logic or storyline—you won't find them here. What you will find is charming, frenetic action as you guide your five female pit-crew members through their unusual tasks. The reason for the all-female team? "In reality, most pit workers are male," Kido explains, "but I really wanted to make the game feel unique. I've never seen an all-female pit crew before, so I'm pretty sure I achieved that goal. In the F1 circuit there are Race Queens, who are essentially walking advertisements, but they bring some beauty into the tracks. I thought, 'What if those Race Queens suddenly started fixing the cars?'"

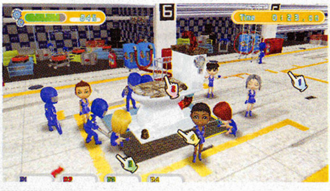
The gameplay involves dragging and dropping your pit-crew members on damaged areas of whatsits as you attempt to fix a set number of objects as fast as possible in Speed mode, or repair as many whatsits as you can within an adjustable time limit in Endurance mode. After you've assigned one (or all) of the ladies a task, you can hold the B Button while gesturing with the Wii remote to speed up the repair process: make a twisting motion to mimic a screwdriver, swing up and down to replicate a hammer, swing side to side to imitate using a wrench, pull the remote back and forth like a saw, or make a circular motion to simulate welding with a blowtorch. Just don't take too long with your repairs, lest the damaged areas explode or start spurting oil, impeding your progress.

Though at first you'll have access to only smaller whatsits—such as motorcycles and flower gardens—the more you play, the bigger and crazier the objects you'll unlock. "There were numerous ideas that came up [for the whatsits], but the very first requirement was whether it was known throughout the world," describes Kido. "Once they were whittled down, then we [selected] unrealistic things that you never see making a pit stop. We left the car and the bike in there to accentuate just how weird it is to have something other than the usual vehicles. If I were to choose a favorite, it would have to be the toilet. It's really memorable when you see the crewmembers working to get that bowl spic-and-span. That scene practically defines the game."

As crazy as the game is, it gets even crazier in multiplayer mode. Up to four players can team up to repair objects cooperatively in Normal mode, or they can compete on opposing teams in Abnormal mode. You can also upload your scores to an online leaderboard, because, after all, who wouldn't want to be honored as the fastest toilet repairman in the world?
—CHRIS H.







Cleaning the toilet in Pit Crew Panic! is way more fun than cleaning the toilet in real life.

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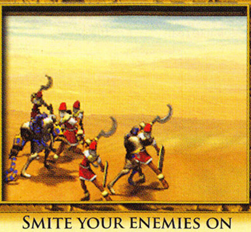
COMMAND HEROES, ARMIES AND MYTHICAL UNITS



SMITE YOUR ENEMIES ON THE BATTLE FIELD

SUMMON THE POWER OF THE GODS

EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
Mild Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

NINTENDO DS
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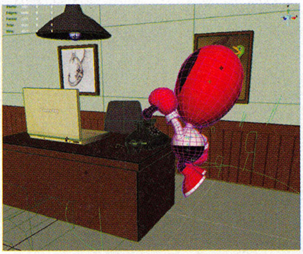
Have a Bad Day

Telltale tells all about the making of Strong Bad's WiiWare adventures.

Since its debut on WiiWare this past summer, the Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People series has consistently delivered on its promise of enjoyable, episodic, point-and-click adventures. Making one good game is tough enough, but making five quality games that arrive on a monthly basis is unheard of on video game consoles. We recently sat down with the creators at Telltale Games to see what goes into making this unique, quirky series. **—CHRIS H.**



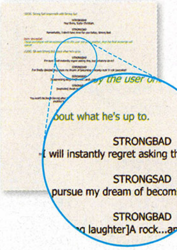
1 License & Original Concept

It all starts, of course, with obtaining the license to make games based on Strong Bad and the other characters in the Homestarrunner.com universe. Telltale pursued the license due to its interesting characters, cultlike following, and episodic nature. The Telltale designers met with Strong Bad's creators, Mike and Matt Chapman, to brainstorm basic episode concepts and work out big-picture details—for example, early on, lispy athlete Homestar Runner was under consideration to be the games' main character. "At the beginning we weren't 100 percent sure it was going to be Strong Bad," admits designer/programmer Mark Darin, "but we eventually settled on the meaner of the two. That would be more fun."

2 Design

The process of making an entire episode takes about three months, the first month of which is spent on design. "We usually come up with a story outline first, with maybe some insight into what some of the puzzles might be that fit into there," Darin explains, "but we don't have a fleshed-out story. We kind of use that as our framework and then we start talking about puzzles and what the interesting obstacles are going to be."

One consideration during the design phase is how much time, work, and money it takes to implement certain aspects of the game. "I guess when we first go into design we kind of have that in the back of our minds, but don't let that restrict us really at that point," adds Darin. "Then when it starts coming together as a realized product, we start kind of thinking, well, we have the budget for two new characters and two new environments. Let's think about how we're going to rearrange what we already thought of to fit into this better structure so it doesn't blow out of proportion."



y the user o

bout what he's up to.

STRONGBAD
I will instantly regret asking this, but,

STRONGSAD
pursue my dream of becoming a s

STRONGBAD
g laughter]A rock...an

3 Scripting & Early Production

Once the design is settled on, the lead designer for the episode spends a week or two writing the script (which is then rewritten by the Chapman brothers as needed), while other members of the development team begin creating characters and environments and setting up the basic gameplay using Telltale's proprietary game engine, the Telltale Tool, which enables simultaneous development of the Wii and PC versions of the game.

4 Content Creation

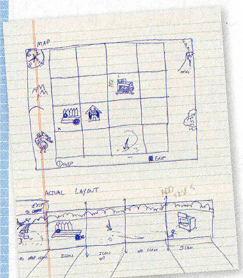
At this point the game is in a rough preliminary state. "We can get through the critical path in ugly, ugly fashion," says designer Mike Stemmle, "but everything's there." Over the next two to three weeks, almost all of the game content comes in—the art, the animation, the more than 1,600 lines of dialogue recorded by Matt Chapman—and the programmers "wire up" the scenes and implement all of the game logic.

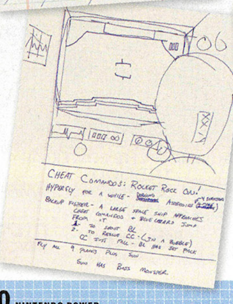
5 Play-Testing

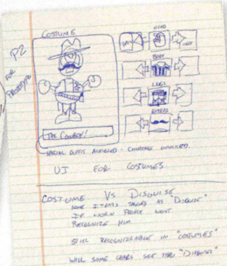
When the core game is nearly done, the Telltale crew presents it to outside play-testers. Feedback from the testers determines what changes need to be made. If a puzzle is too hard it may be simplified, or if something is unclear, new dialogue may be written and recorded. One puzzle removed due to play-test feedback came early in Episode 3. "There was this stereo system sitting downstairs in Strong Bad's [house]," recalls Stemmle, "which had some decent little voice gags, but [there also was] a record player and you had all these records in the first act that you didn't even use until late in the game.... Players were getting confused, so we just ripped it all out, made it much simpler."

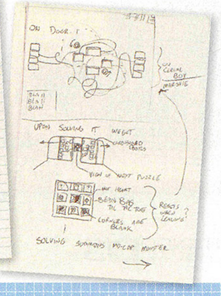
6 Fixing & Finalizing

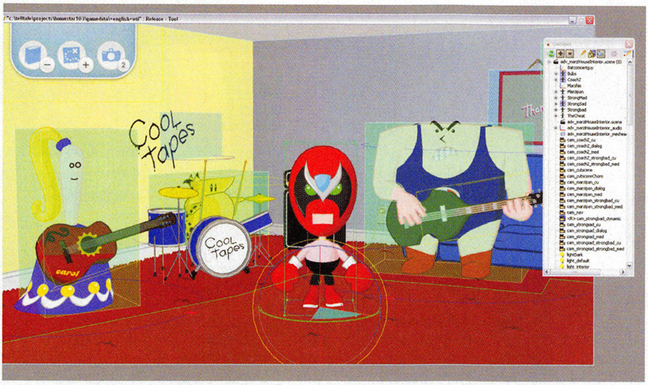
With feedback in hand, the development team spends up to two weeks polishing the game: fixing bugs, making changes, and implementing final music and sound effects. "I think the toughest part is those last two weeks when you realize that not everything that you want is going to happen," Darin notes. "And that's just the


MAP
ACTUAL LAYOUT
EXIT


CHEAT COMMANDOS: ROCKET ROCK ON!
HYPERFLY FOR A WHILE - DODGING ASTEROIDS
BACKUP FIGHTER - A LARGE SPACE SHIP APPROACHES
CHEAT COMMANDOS + BLUE LIZARD JUMP FROM IT
1. TO SHOOT BL
2. TO RESCUE CC - (IN A BUBBLE)
CC JUST FALL - BL HAS JET PACK
FLY ALL 9 PLANETS PLUS SUN
SUN HAS BOSS MONSTER.


P2
FOR PROTOTYPE
COSTUME
HEAD
BODY
LEGS
EXTRAS
THE COWBOY!
SPECIAL OUTFIT ACHIEVED - COSTUME UNLOCKED.
UI FOR COSTUMES
COSTUME VS DISGUISE
SOME ITEMS TAGGED AS "DISGUISE"
IF WORN PEOPLE WON'T RECOGNIZE HIM
STILL RECOGNIZEABLE IN "COSTUMES"
WILL SOME CHARS SEE THRU "DISGUISES"


ON DOOR
CEREAL BOY
MARSHIE
BLAH BLAH BLAH
UPON SOLVING IT WE GET
CARDBOARD DOORS
VIEW OF NEXT PUZZLE
HALF HEART
BEAN BAG TIC TAC TOE
CORNERS ARE BLANK
REACTS WHEN LEAVING?
SOLVING SUMMONS NO-CAP MONSTER

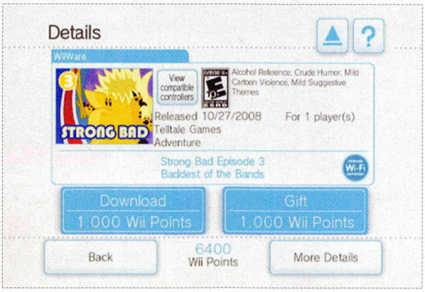


[Above] The Telltale Tool significantly speeds up development by allowing the creators to work simultaneously and implement changes quickly.

designer part of me saying I want everything that I possibly dreamed of to be perfect. Nobody else is going to notice these things except me, because I've already got them in my head." After the game is essentially complete, it still has to go through an official Nintendo review and approval process; that step can take another two or three weeks.

7 Burninate!

Finally, one Monday morning the game arrives on the Wii Shop Channel. First you download. Then you play. Then you burninate!

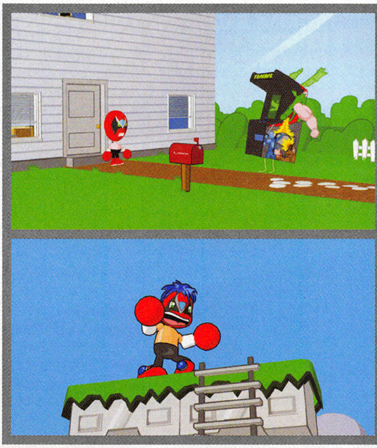

Details

WiiWare

Alcohol Reference, Crude Humor, Mild Cartoon Violence, Mild Suggestive Themes

Released 10/27/2008 For 1 player(s)
Telltale Games
Adventure

Strong Bad Episode 3
Baddest of the Bands



The Grand Finale

If the season finale of Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People isn't available by the time you read this, it should be before long. Titled 8-Bit Is Enough, the episode allows players to finally interact with the Trogdor arcade machine in Strong Bad's basement—unfortunately, the machine has sprouted legs and actually come to life, and it's terrorizing Free Country USA, so it's up to you to stop it. The episode also features appearances by faux classic games Peasant's Quest and Stinkoman 20X6 from Homestarrunner.com.

Space Evaders

You can run, but you can't hide in Evasive Space.

The point-to-pilot controls of Yuke's upcoming WiiWare title Evasive Space allow you to guide Stellar Guardian Konki around obstacles and through complex environments in a search for the lost Constellation Stones. Developed by High Voltage Software, the game has you zigging, zagging, and avoiding enemy fire in 20 missions—timed trials in tight corridors and object-collection free-for-alls with Dr. Dark Matter's roving space thieves hot on your trail. You guide the ship by aiming with your remote to navigate the Gobo Caves, the rings of planet Minot IV, Velkor's Pyroclastic Ship of Doom, and beyond. You can take on friends in local multiplayer sessions for four and compare your scores with others by contributing to the online leaderboard.

—GEORGE S.

Gun Powder

Fly over a mogul then launch a missile. You're gunning for the gold in Hudson's Snowboard Riot.

Not since James Bond took on a gang of gun-toting skiers in *For Your Eyes Only* has making it to the bottom of the hill been as dangerous as it is in Snowboard Riot. You and your competitors (up to four online or split screen) rip through the game's four courses while targeting each other for early elimination. The control scheme supports the Wii Balance Board for feet-first slope carving, or a board-free method that employs the Wii remote and nunchuk. As you ride, you'll grab red power-ups to load up on weapons (such as rockets and fan blades) and blue power-ups to gain shields or a turbo boost. If you've had enough fighting, you can switch to Stoic mode for a straight race or tackle the courses in Time Attack mode. A great performance earns you Oakley goggles, hats, and other clothing items that improve your stats and chances for an even better run. —**GEORGE S.**

DOWNLOAD STATION

WiiWare

ALIEN CRUSH RETURNS

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **PINBALL**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Alien Crush Returns is the kind of pinball game that will appeal to gamers across the board. Those who don't usually play pinball games should enjoy the unique alien motif and boss battles that set it apart from other pinball titles, while vets should enjoy the solid action and interesting level gimmicks. Though the Story mode is on the short side, the three Arcade-mode tables will keep you scoring for a long while. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

WiiWare

ART STYLE: ROTOHEX

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **600**

The third title in Nintendo's slick Art Style series has you spinning six-triangle hexagons in an interlocking grid. Every hexagon you build with same-color pieces disappears, making room for more triangles. The pace is more hurried than that of its predecessors, but a jazzy soundtrack keeps everything cool. A point-and-click control scheme is available but the Control Pad method is more manageable. —**GEORGE S.**

Recommended

WiiWare

BRAIN CHALLENGE

PUBLISHER: **GAMELOFT**
GENRE: **BRAIN TRAINING**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Following the success of Brain Age, everyone and their mother is trying to cash in on the test-your-grey-matter craze. Like the vast majority of such efforts, Brain Challenge falls flat due to its uninteresting minigames, nonsensical pseudoscience, and lackluster presentation. The most important brain challenge here is whether you're smart enough to spend your $10 on something else. —**STEVE T.**

Grumble Grumble

WiiWare

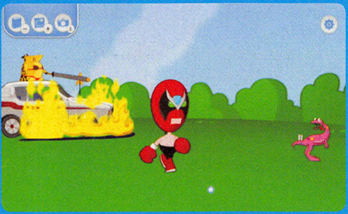
HOME SWEET HOME

PUBLISHER: **BIG BLUE BUBBLE**
GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

At first glance, Home Sweet Home is like The Sims without the whole life-simulation aspect in that you decorate a room with objects (sofas, TVs, etc.). There's a bit more strategy involved than just placing objects willy-nilly, however, as you keep your interior designs under budget while keeping your clients and workers happy. That said, the overall experience gets old after only a short while. —**JUSTIN C.**

Hmmm...

WiiWare



STRONG BAD EPISODE 3: BADDEST OF THE BANDS

PUBLISHER: **TELLTALE** • GENRE: **ADVENTURE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Chris H's Pick

The third episode of Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People is arguably the best installment yet. Not that the other games haven't been quality point-and-click adventures, but this third chapter really nails the structure and pacing, and the puzzles are very well done—anything that involves bleach, bats, and a washing machine is gold. The trademark Homestarrunner.com humor shines through as well. If you haven't checked out the Strong Bad games yet, this is a great place to jump on.

Recommended

WiiWare

STRONG BAD EPISODE 4: DANGERESQUE 3

PUBLISHER: **TELLTALE**
GENRE: **ADVENTURE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

With the Strong Bad titles coming out so frequently, it would be easy for the formula to get old. Luckily, Dangeresque sidesteps that pitfall by setting the entire adventure within a low-budget movie, providing new takes on the characters and locales and pumping things up with a groovy soundtrack. One logic-defying puzzle near the end left me grumbling, but otherwise this is an excellent game. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

WiiWare

TARGET TOSS PRO: BAGS

PUBLISHER: **INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGIES**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
Wii POINTS: **700**

From the makers of Geist comes Target Toss Pro: Bags, a game that's exactly as thrilling as its title implies. After choosing your throwing arm and gender, you (and up to 15 friends) take turns throwing bags at a target, and...that's pretty much it. Simply put, the game is uneventful and unexciting, and it has little appeal outside of a party where you have nothing else to play. —**CHRIS H.**

Grumble Grumble

IT'LL BLOW YOUR MIND!
Big Bang MINI
NINTENDO DS
Big Bang MINI
EVERYONE
SOUTHPEAK
NINTENDO DS
Wi-Fi

"FIREWORKS AND TOP-DOWN SHOOTING. TOGETHER AT LAST."

"BIG BANG MINI IS DEFINITELY GOING TO BE WORTH A LOOK FOR DS OWNERS." ... ign.com

EVERYONE
E
Mild Fantasy Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

NINTENDO DS™

Arkedo studio

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WANTED!

It's unanimous—the readers and editors agree that the highly acclaimed entry in the Castlevania series, Dracula X: Rondo of Blood, is the TurboGrafx game most in need of a Virtual Console debut. It's out in Japan, so what's Konami waiting for? The readers and editors were in surprising agreement on the remainder of their lists as well, which include some of the biggest cult classics in the TurboGrafx library. The TurboGrafx has a pretty big presence on Virtual Console, but there's clearly room for more.

READERS' MOST WANTED: TURBOGRAFX

1. Dracula X: Rondo of Blood (Japan only)
2. Ys IV: Dawn of Ys (Japan only)
3. Snatcher (Japan only)
4. Legendary Axe
5. Final Lap Twin

NP STAFF'S MOST WANTED: TURBOGRAFX

1. Dracula X: Rondo of Blood (Japan only)
2. Final Lap Twin
3. Snatcher (Japan only)
4. World Court Tennis
5. Legendary Axe

We'll find out next issue what the most-wanted NES games are, and follow it up with a list of most-wanted NeoGeo titles. Send your top five picks for **NES** and/or **NeoGeo** games to **vcpoll@nintendopower.com** and we'll print the results in an upcoming issue. Note: This is for polling purposes only and will in no way determine future Virtual Console releases.

DOWNLOAD STATION

WiiWare

YUMMY YUMMY COOKING JAM

PUBLISHER: **VIRTUAL TOYS**
GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Much like Zoo Games's Order Up!, Yummy Yummy Cooking Jam expands the cooking genre by mixing motion-based cooking actions with serving food and running a restaurant. There's not a lot of menu variety, but the activities are fun, the graphics have a unique charm, and a Story mode gives the game some depth. Bizarrely uneven difficulty prevents me from giving this game a full recommendation, however. —**CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

Virtual Console

EARTHWORM JIM

PLATFORM: **SEGA GENESIS** • PUBLISHER: **INTERPLAY/ PLAYMATES** • GENRE: **ACTION** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1994**

Steve T's Pick

At a time when every video game publisher under the sun was introducing mascots, Earthworm Jim had what it took to stand out: fantastic art direction and animation, a zany sense of humor, and some of the tightest action-platforming this side of Mario and Sonic. It's one of the true classics of the 16-bit era, and remains an absolute blast to this day. Now we just need Jim to come out of retirement.

Recommended

Virtual Console

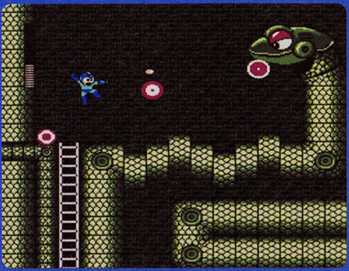
FORGOTTEN WORLDS

PLATFORM: **SEGA GENESIS**
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM/SEGA**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1989**

Forgotten Worlds is the quintessential co-op shooter. Not only do you need a friend to watch your back for swarms of incoming enemies, but the game is freakishly hard in single-player mode since you have no continues. It also contains several unique features, such as a shop and 360-degree shooting. This is required playing, but only if you're into co-op. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

Virtual Console



MEGA MAN 3

PLATFORM: **NES** • PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
GENRE: **ACTION** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1990**

Chris H's Pick

Mega Man 3 may not have the sterling reputation of Mega Man 2, but the Blue Bomber's third outing is still a fantastic game. The winning rock-paper-scissors-style gameplay continues to impress, and the level design is excellent. Also, the game introduces many staples of the Mega Man universe, including Mega Man's brother Proto Man, and Rush, Mega Man's versatile pooch. Remixed levels featuring the return of the Mega Man 2 bosses help cement the title's appeal.

Recommended

Virtual Console

SPACE HARRIER

PLATFORM: **MASTER SYSTEM**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1986**

Sure, this port of arcade game Space Harrier has the basic gameplay of the original, but it's hampered by the less-powerful Master System hardware. The ugly, choppy graphics can lead to frustration; it's hard to dodge all of the lethal objects thrown your way when they seem to appear right in front of you. You're better off with Space Harrier II, which is already available on Virtual Console. —**JUSTIN C.**

Grumble Grumble

Virtual Console

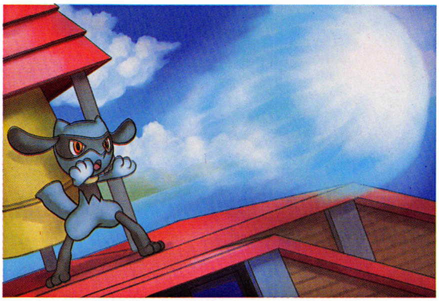
SPACE INVADERS: THE ORIGINAL GAME

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES**
PUBLISHER: **TAITO/ NINTENDO**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1997**

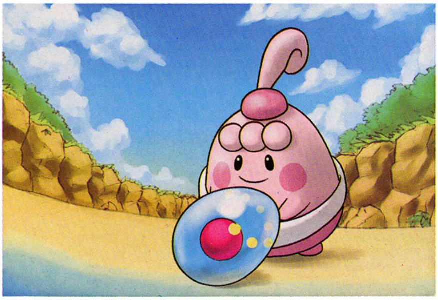
The title sums it up—Space Invaders: The Original Game is, well, the original Space Invaders. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing depends entirely on how much you like this old-school arcade game, as that's pretty much all you're getting. Personally, I'd rather save my Wii points for something more robust. —**JUSTIN C.**

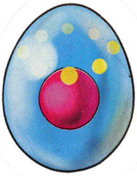
Hmmm...

POKéMON RANGER
SHADOWS OF ALMIA

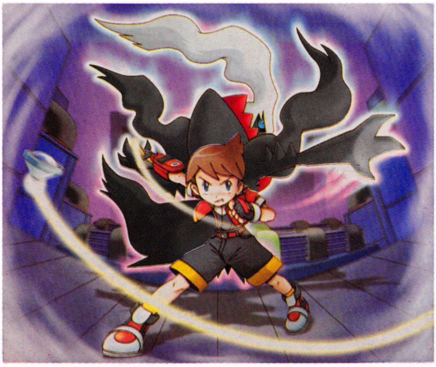


Rescue Kidnapped Riolu!





Recover the Manaphy Egg!



Liberate the Tower!

Nintendo Wi-Fi connection

www.PokemonRanger.com

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POKÉMON RANGER
SHADOWS OF ALMIA

SPECIAL MISSION NEWS

RANGER ALERT!

A Pokémon Ranger's work is never done, but it's certainly rewarding! Even if you think you've explored everything there is to see in the land of Almia, there are new surprises in store! Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia allows you to download very rare Special Missions by connecting to Nintendo® Wi-Fi Connection. These Missions allow you to embark on new adventures – and meet new Pokémon too! Enjoy your Special Mission stickers, and find out more about the first three Special Missions, available only for a limited time!

NEW!

DON'T MISS YOUR CHANCE TO CAPTURE DARKRAI™!

A new Special Mission featuring Darkrai called "Liberate the Tower!" is available December 1st, 2008 through January 31st, 2009 on Ranger Net. To play this Special Mission, you'll need to play through the game until you reach the end. When you complete this Mission, you will be able to transfer Darkrai to your copy of either Pokémon Diamond or Pokémon Pearl (sold separately). The mysterious Darkrai cannot be caught in Pokémon Diamond or Pokémon Pearl under normal circumstances, so don't miss this chance! Also on Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection.

AVAILABLE NOW!

SPECIAL MISSION: RECOVER THE MANAPHY™ EGG!

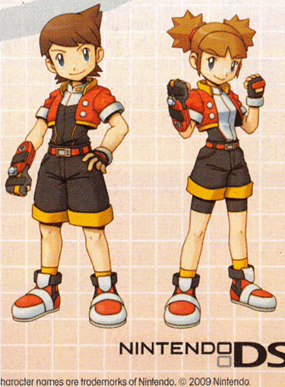
To play this Mission, you must advance through Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia until you become an Area Ranger. When you complete the Mission, you'll be able to transfer the Manaphy Egg to your copy of either Pokémon Diamond or Pokémon Pearl (sold separately). It all starts when a young girl reports that her Happiny has gone missing.

AVAILABLE NOW!

SPECIAL MISSION: RESCUE KIDNAPPED RIOLU™!

To play this Mission, you must advance through the game until you reach the ending. When you complete the Mission, you'll be able to transfer Riolu, which knows Aura Sphere, to your copy of either Pokémon Diamond or Pokémon Pearl (sold separately). The Mission begins when a young boy claims that Riolu is responsible for a mysterious blast.

To receive the Special Missions, go to Ranger Net from the Main Menu and download it via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. For more information on using Ranger Net, visit www.pokemonranger.com. And stay on the lookout for additional Ranger Net Missions coming soon!



ACT FAST!

THESE SPECIAL MISSIONS ARE ONLY AVAILABLE THROUGH JANUARY 31ST, 2009!

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Mild Cartoon Violence

nintendo Wi-Fi connection

The Pokémon Company Nintendo

NINTENDO DS™

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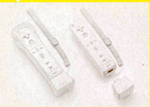
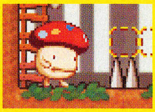
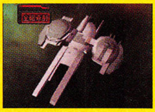
Router and broadband access required for online play. For more info, go to Nintendo.com.

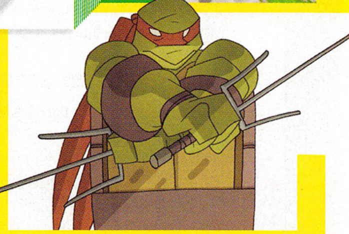


2009

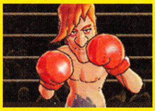
THE YEAR IN PREVIEW

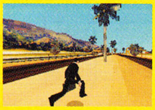


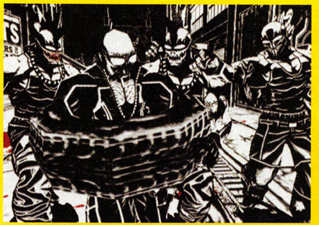


PLAYER 100/100


2009 may just be getting started, but it's already looking like an incredible year for Nintendo fans. It's going to be a year of returns: the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are making an astonishing comeback in an intense four-player fighting game, beloved platforming hero Klonoa is bringing his unique whimsy to Wii, Little Mac is aiming to reclaim the championship gold, and hit franchises like Grand Theft Auto, The House of the Dead, Suikoden, and Tenchu are being reborn on Wii and DS. 2009 is also going to be a year of innovation: original games such as The Conduit, MadWorld, Little King's Story, Muramasa: The Demon Blade, and Rhythm Heaven will take gamers to fascinating places the likes of which they're never seen. And 2009 will be a year of technological advancement: Wii MotionPlus and Nintendo DSi will show you new ways to experience gaming. Amazingly, the games on these pages are just the beginning (this is supposed to be the quiet time of year); even more will be revealed in the coming months. Please look forward to it.







Our concern right now is Erull. The crystal sickness CAN be cured, if we

Escape
Break
NIGE
Combo 04

It's an emergen!!

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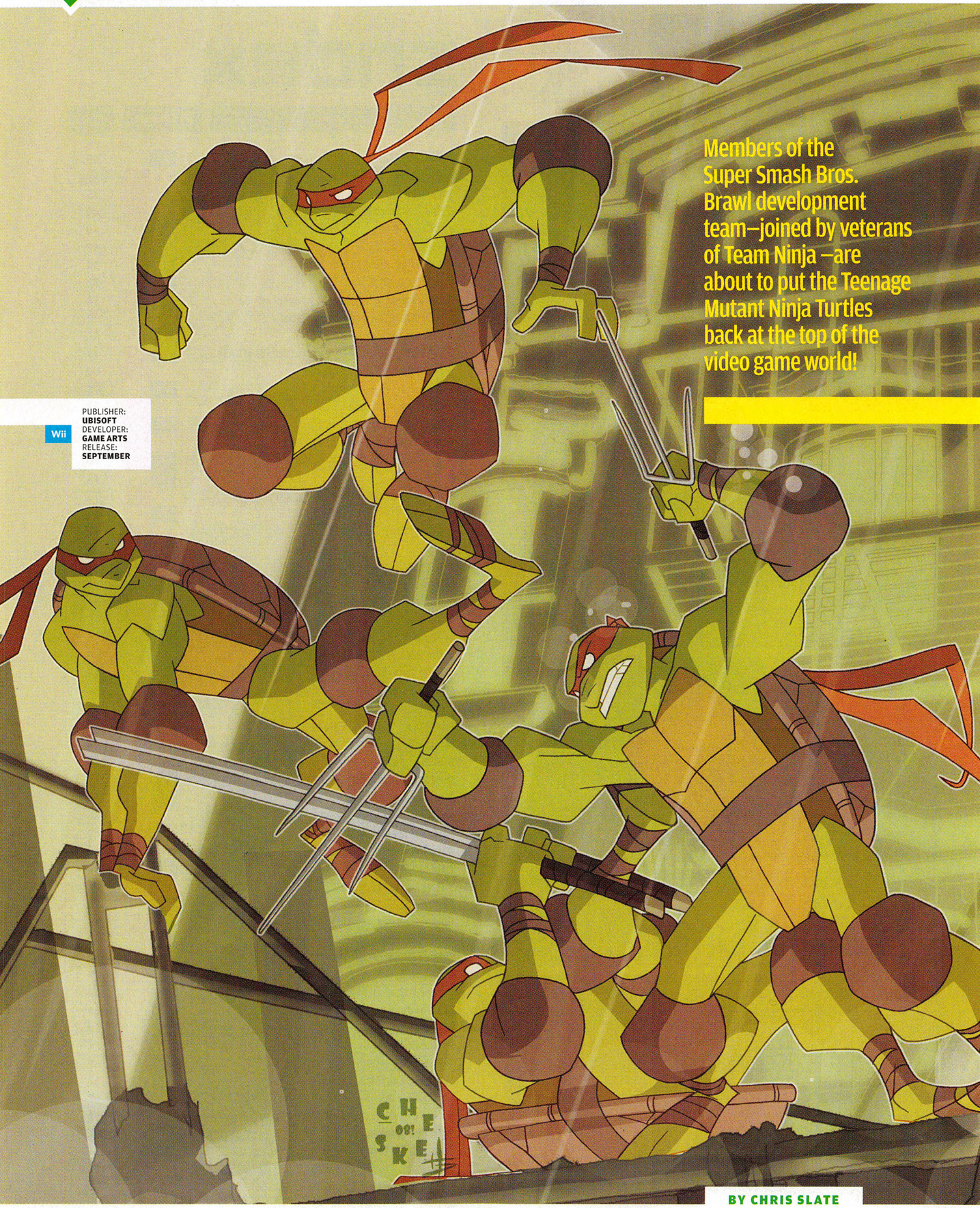
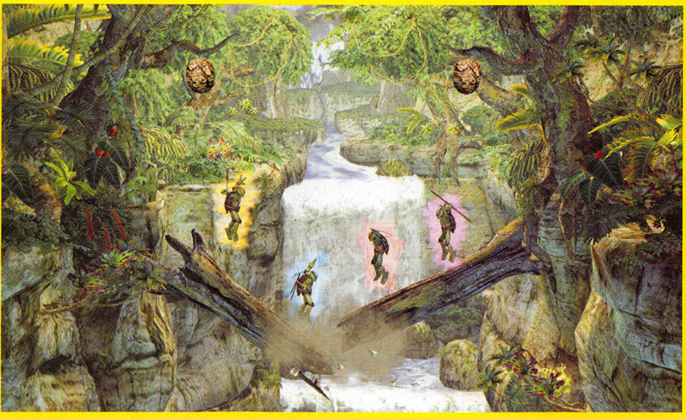


Members of the Super Smash Bros. Brawl development team—joined by veterans of Team Ninja —are about to put the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles back at the top of the video game world!

Wii
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **GAME ARTS**
RELEASE: **SEPTEMBER**

BY CHRIS SLATE



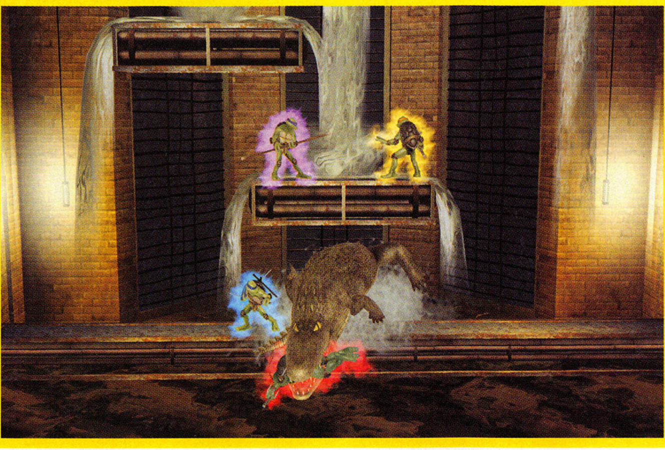
SHELL-SHOCKER!

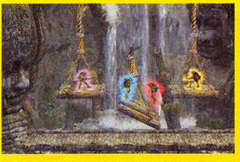
To kick off our big 2009 preview special, we've got an exclusive sneak peek at a game that's so early it hasn't even been named yet! For now we'll just call it TMNT. A new Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles game is always worth at least a raised eyebrow (despite the, er, *mixed* results of the foursome's last several titles), but when it's a four-player fighting game made by some of the folks who worked on Super Smash Bros. Brawl and former members of Tecmo's famed Team Ninja (who worked on the Ninja Gaiden and Dead or Alive series), then we're looking at one of the most exciting stories of the new year.

Seeing Is Believing

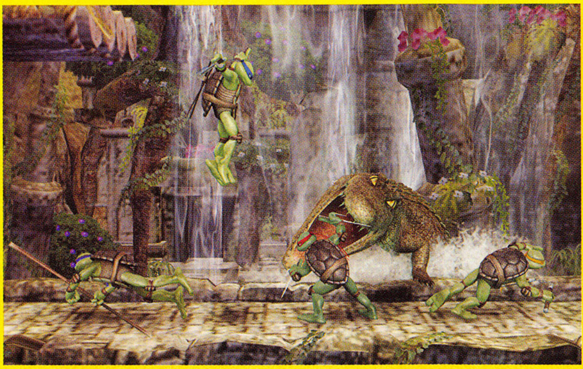
We wouldn't have believed it if we hadn't seen it, but there we were in late November at Ubisoft's San Francisco offices, watching turtle-versus-turtle combat. Ubisoft—who will publish the game—had been looking for an opportunity to work with Game Arts, part of the all-star team that developed Brawl under the direction of Super Smash Bros. creator Masahiro Sakurai. The studio became available just as it was time for Ubi to start a new Turtles project to release in 2009—the 25th anniversary of TMNT. And then former members of Team Ninja joined the production to officially make this the craziest story we've ever heard.

▸





The lower jungle area has three hanging log platforms that will eventually break if they take a lot of hits.



[Left] Beware the crocodile! [Right] Beware the hornets' nests!

The version of the game that we got to see is very early—it's been in development for just over a year—but it already looks impressive (Ubisoft is aiming for a September '09 release). In fact, the visuals may even surpass the bar set by Brawl; for example, a rooftops level features a city skyline that is much more detailed than most Brawl stages. And we were instantly relieved to see that this isn't meant to be just a kids' game. The visuals are dark and edgy for a TMNT title, and we were guaranteed that our ears wouldn't have to suffer through endless loops of Turtles quips like "slice and dice!" during the action. Further, the team has wisely avoided tying the game in with any particular iteration of TMNT—it doesn't look exactly like any of the comics, cartoons, or toys.

Q&A: Noriaki Kazama, chief director at Game Arts

Having worked on the hard-hitting Dead or Alive series, Kazama is well qualified to take the Turtles to the top of the fighting-game arena. While we couldn't convince him to spill all of the game's secrets, he let slip some juicy tidbits after we applied ninja mind tricks and delicious pizza.

NINTENDO POWER
How did this project begin? Did you approach Ubisoft with the idea, or did they come to you?

NORIAKI KAZAMA
We started to plan this project back in October of 2007. We actually started designing and developing the game on a real system in January of this year (2008).

Were many on your team already familiar with the Turtles?
Yes. Most of the team remembered the cutesy turtles from the old '80s cartoon and from the old Konami games. The CG movie never released in Japan and as such we only saw the movie after the planning for this game was set. Everyone on the team was really surprised, as the turtles looked nothing like the old cartoons that we remembered. These turtles were much cooler. We were really excited thinking, "these turtles will make for a much cooler game!"

What is it that makes this property a good fit for this type of fighting game?
Well, let's see: it's multiplayer; controls are simple; it's got ninja magic, martial arts, and lots of general ninja action; stages that have lots of active features; exciting gameplay.

What are the qualifications for winning: KOs or life meter?
Either is possible, as you can set them via the match options.

We've seen a turtle swing around a bar in midair—what role does this new element play, and does it indicate a more acrobatic style of fighting?
It represents one of the most basic ninja techniques, and using this will allow you to inflict a large amount of damage on your opponent. However, just because you don't use it doesn't mean you can't win.

We've heard that former members of Team Ninja have also joined your staff; could you tell us more about what they've worked on previously and how they are contributing to the creation of TMNT?
These guys worked on all of the Dead or Alive games (minus Beach Volleyball), Ninja Gaiden 2, and the Ninja Gaiden series (not including the DS game). Team Ninja members are working on character motions and stage design, and there are a few who are also working in the program team.

The TMNT license has had its ups and downs over the past 25 years, with both good and bad games, comics, cartoons, etc. Are there any iterations of the turtles that your team has used for inspiration?
The control [that we've been given] over the design of the Turtles has been pretty generous, and with its music, the bold cover song (main theme) really charms us. It's something that doesn't exist in any of the other original American comics that we think is really cool. As for which of the three iterations (games, comics, or cartoons) we like the most, we're pretty torn. Speaking strictly from a game-development perspective, the 2007 CG TMNT movie takes the cake. We definitely got the most inspiration for this game from the CG movie. As for me personally, I found the original comic to be the most appealing as far as the style of the images. That turtle grimace is the best! The head and body proportions are pretty off in that comic, at least a bit, but I really think it's the coolest.

Are you familiar with past TMNT games, especially the fighting games? Are there elements of those titles that have inspired you, or that you wanted to avoid?
TMNT: Tournament Fighters was made by Konami for the SNES. Almost all of the staff here, including myself, remembers that game. Everyone thinks it was pretty fun. There's really nothing, though, that we want to take from those older titles and put into this game.

Will music from past TMNT cartoons or movies be included, or will the game have a completely original score?
Everything is going to be original.

What modes will be included?
Story mode, Battle Royal, Tournament, Winner Stays/Loser Stays, and Practice mode. There are also some additional unlockable modes to look forward to!

Could you please describe the game's controls? We know that players can choose to use either the remote and nunchuk together or just the remote—will

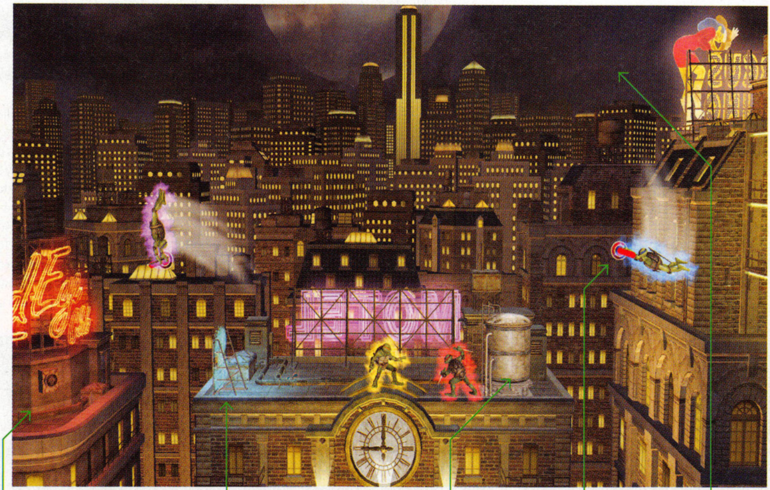
Getting into the Action

As you can probably gather from these screens, the game is quite similar to Brawl in look and feel. There are some differences in the gameplay that we'll get to in a moment—and some other features that will set TMNT apart that Ubisoft isn't ready to reveal yet—but the action should feel instantly familiar to anyone who's put time into a Super Smash Bros.-style fighting game.

Up to four players can fight at once, and since competing Turtles can be tough to distinguish between when the camera is far away, each character is color-coded with a glowing effect. The fighting is what you'd expect: ▶

City Tour

To give you an example of how interactive the stages are, let's take a detailed look at the Manhattan rooftops level. And keep in mind, the game's director says this is one of the simpler stages!



FIGHT HERE, TOO! The battle can be taken over to this smaller rooftop.

LOOK OUT BELOW Falling leads to an instant KO, but certain ninja skills—such as running up walls—can save your shell.

SHOCKING SIGN Players knocked into this electric sign will get a nasty zap.

THIRSTY? Busting open this water tower releases a gush of water that will knock opponents over the ledge.

ROUND AND ROUND By swinging on these poles, players can jump higher or deliver powerful flying kicks.

NICE VIEW! The environments are already impressively detailed, and many effects—such as anti-aliasing—aren't even in yet.

there be any other options, such as the GameCube or Classic controllers? Are any motion controls used? How do special attacks work?
Currently the game is designed to be the most fun to play via the Wii remote and nunchuk. This is still being discussed.

Can we expect a lot of unlockable characters, stages, and other goodies?
We will definitely have unlockables. Some of the stages, characters, and modes will be locked at first, but we haven't yet decided how they will be unlocked. Depending on the play level, players can unlock an unreasonably hard difficulty mode, for example.

In addition to the Turtles, which other playable characters can you confirm? And can you tell us roughly how many characters and stages to expect?
We'd have to get confirmation from Ubisoft on how much we could reveal regarding unlockable characters. I think it's safe for us to say that you'll see "the Turtles' fated enemy." As far as stages go, you'll definitely see the Turtle hideout.

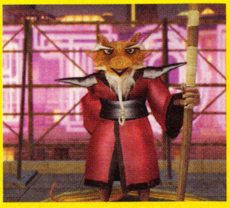
How will the characters' fighting styles differ?
Each character will have their own weapons and their style will differ accordingly.

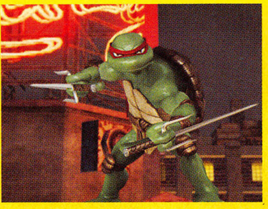
The stages that we've seen so far, such as the rooftops area, seemed to be very interactive. Can you talk a little about that aspect of the gameplay, and list a few different examples of fun things to do on specific levels?
There are objects in some levels that, if you hit them, will move you to a completely different battlefield. Elements that react and change due to the players' actions are important to have in this game, so when you play, take a look around each of the stages and try to fiddle with things to see what happens. In fact, the Manhattan stage that you saw has been designed to provide a very orthodox battle. We have plenty of other more-exciting and -unique levels that await you!

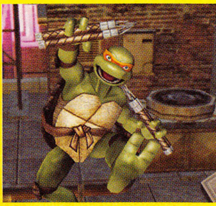
regular moves, special moves, throws, and combos. There are also attacks that use the environment, such as flying kicks off of walls, or attacks while hanging from ledges. In true ninja style, you can run short distances up walls, and some stages have poles that you can grab and swing on for higher jumps and more-punishing jump-kicks.

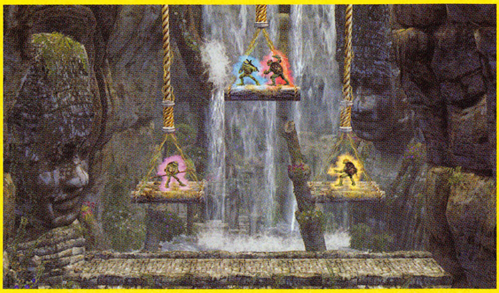
There will be multiple control schemes to choose from; we can confirm both Wii-remote-and-nunchuk and remote-only options. No word yet on whether a GameCube controller will work, but a new control scheme is said to be in development for advanced players. Motion controls will be used, but not extensively—don't expect to be swinging your remote constantly for common attacks. We can also report that taunts are in the game (we saw Leonardo mock his opponents by spinning his swords in the air) and that items will play a role in the fighting (although the only one we were able to catch a glimpse of was a health-restoring pizza).

Players each have a life meter that depletes when they take damage, and it's possible to be KO'd instantly by falling off the screen (plus, match rules can be customized). The game will have a generous roster of characters pulled from the Turtles' long history (we've been told Mirage Studios, which owns the TMNT brand, has been involved with the

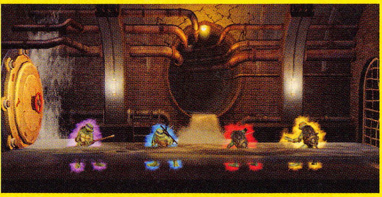

Master Splinter


Raphael


Michelangelo



From wide-open areas to cramped quarters, TMNT promises a lot of variety in its battle arenas.



Q&A: Chris Ferriter, producer, Ubisoft

Chris Ferriter is responsible for the overall direction and management of the TMNT games, and works closely with both the development team at Game Arts and Mirage Studios, owners of the TMNT license. Chris sat down with us to give his insight into this unique project and how it came about.

NINTENDO POWER What timeframe are you targeting for the game's release?
CHRIS FERRITER We're targeting a September '09 release, to tie into the 25th anniversary of the Turtles.

Ubisoft is working on a TMNT title with members of the Super Smash Bros team from Game Arts and former members of Team Ninja—that's possibly the craziest and most interesting team-up we've ever heard of. How did this project come about?
One of our goals at Ubisoft San Francisco is to create partnerships with top-tier developers, and since Game Arts has long had a reputation of creating great games, we've been looking for an opportunity to work with them for some time. We had the TMNT license, and we knew that we wanted to go in a different direction with it, and we felt that Game Arts could really be the team to do that. It was a perfect match.

What is it that makes this property a good fit for this type of fighting game?
I think it's a great fit for a fighting game. There are so many characters in the Turtles' universe, and each one is so compelling and unique, with weapons, attacks, and weaknesses that are so specific to that character.

Will the game release on other consoles besides Wii, either simultaneously or down the road?
I can't really comment on that just yet.

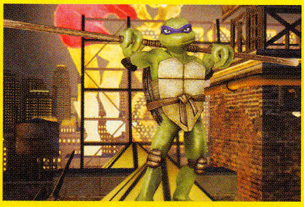
Are any other TMNT games—such as a DS version—planned to tie into the Wii title?
I can't talk about it just yet, but we've got some really exciting plans for TMNT.

Will TMNT be playable online, and if so, can we expect a smoother experience than Brawl's?
I don't really want to draw too many comparisons between us and Brawl, but I will say that we have a very robust online multiplayer mode planned.

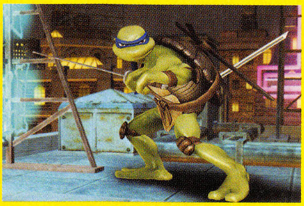
Whereas the stages in Brawl included a wide variety of visual styles to match different game franchises, will everything in TMNT adhere to a single, unified look?
In terms of art style, you could say we have a look that changes as you progress through the game, like an evolution from the realistic to the fantastic. We've also got some surprises in there for fans of the Turtles.

Are you considering any type of downloadable content, such as extra stages or characters?
We haven't ruled out downloadable content, but right now we're focused on getting as much as we can into the core game.

Have you been in contact with the creators of the Turtles at Mirage Studios, or anyone else associated with the characters?
Yeah, Mirage has been great. We worked very closely with them to create the concept and storyline for the game. They really opened their doors to us and gave us access to anything



Donatello



Leonardo

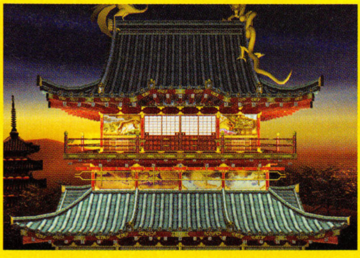
character-selection process), but so far we've been able to peek at only the Turtles themselves and Splinter, their rat sensei.

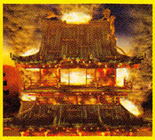
Among the game's various modes and match types (most of which are still a closely guarded secret) is a story mode. All we could get out of Ubi is that it won't be a side-scroller like Brawl's Subspace Emissary, and that Peter Laird—cocreator of TMNT—worked on the story. Four-player online battles are also planned, and the developers are working hard to deliver a smooth experience free of the issues that hindered Brawl. They also want to add something unique to the mix, so expect a new twist or two.

Beautiful Battlegrounds

Finally, we were really impressed by the game's stages. We got to check out two of them, and they both looked as though they could hang with the best Brawl has to offer, thanks to lots of environmental interaction and plenty of visual detail. The first stage we saw was a gorgeous rooftop battle against a detailed city skyline, featuring a water tower that could be busted open to send water gushing out at opponents, an electric sign that zapped whoever got knocked into it, lots of long falls between the buildings, and poles to swing on for sky-high acrobatics. The next level took place in the sewers and started in a small, confined area with water flowing along the ground. But when someone beat on a giant hatch on the left side of the room, it broke open and unleashed a tidal wave that pushed everyone into the stage's second area, a vertical chamber with slippery platforms and a crocodile that popped out at random to chomp on unsuspecting victims.

We haven't been this excited about the Turtles in years. If the developers can deliver on the promise of what we've seen so far, fighting fans will have something pretty special to look forward to in the back half of '09. Ubisoft tells us the development team is determined to set a new standard for the genre, and that the fighting may end up being even deeper than Brawl's. If they can pull that off, then, whoa—cowabunga, dude.





The Japanese castle has three levels to fight on, and lanterns that can cause the stage to catch fire.

we needed. When I started on this project I assumed that the licensor of a multibillion-dollar franchise like TMNT would be headquartered in some NY skyscraper, full of guys in expensive suits. I could not have been more wrong. Everyone at Mirage has been there from the beginning, and it's still a small group of down-to-earth people who love comics and really care about this brand. We couldn't have been blessed with a better partner.

Many longtime gamers fondly remember the Turtles' arcade and NES games, but the last several TMNT titles haven't fared too well with the critics. What do you think could have been done better with those titles, and how are those concerns being addressed with this new game?

Well, since I wasn't involved in any of the other TMNT games and don't know the challenges they faced, I don't want to say anything negative about them, but I will say that we have a great opportunity this time around. While this is a licensed game, it's not tied to any movie or TV show where you have a guaranteed audience. In order for this game to succeed on its own it needs to be a *great* game. We wouldn't be making this game if we didn't think we could build something that was truly great.

Finally, what's been the coolest thing about working on this game so far?

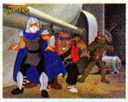
Well, I grew up reading the TMNT comics, watching the movies and the cartoons, so it's incredibly rewarding to have an opportunity to play a small role in what I believe will be the best Turtles game to date.

2009 marks the 25th anniversary of TMNT, and there will be many new products and events tied to the yearlong celebration. Here's a look at some of best stuff from the past and future of TMNT.

THE ORIGINAL COMIC

Created by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird in 1984, this black-and-white indy comic started it all with a dark and violent take on the Turtles.

THE FIRST CARTOON



Most longtime TMNT fans probably met the Turtles through the hit 1987 cartoon, which recast them in a more family-friendly light.

THE FIRST TOYS

Remember these cornball classics? Look for them to hit stores once again with collector's reissues in 2009.

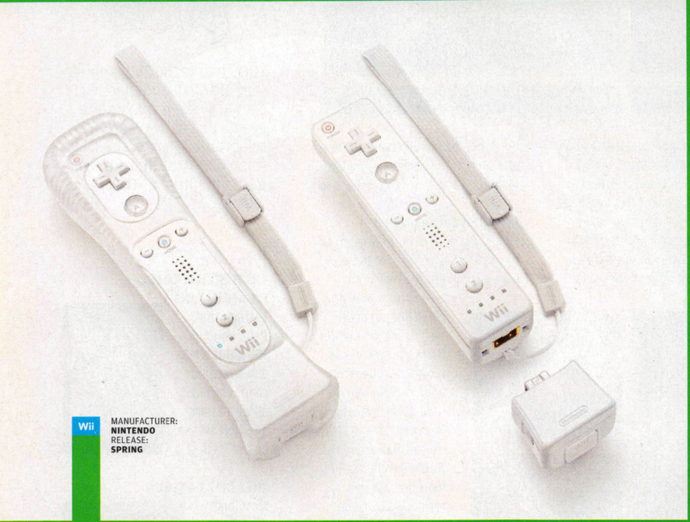
THE NEW TOYS

In addition to the re-releases, be on the lookout for these brand-new TMNT action figures.

TODAY'S TMNT COMICS

The Turtles have gotten their harder edge back in the new comics, and are definitely worth a look.

Wii MotionPlus



Wii

MANUFACTURER:
NINTENDO
RELEASE:
SPRING

The Wii MotionPlus hasn't received much attention since it was first revealed at E3 2008, but the diminutive accessory has the potential to make a big impact in 2009. The peripheral plugs into the bottom of the Wii remote and allows the controller to more accurately capture complex movement by adding a gyroscope that determines rotational motion. In other words, it allows for true 1:1 response, reflecting the slightest movement of a player's arm or wrist in real time. Though our experience with the attachment thus far has been limited, we already see the potential for it to elevate motion controls to a whole new level. More importantly, a number of developers have expressed excitement over implementing the technology in future projects (see below for a couple of examples).

One Wii MotionPlus accessory will come packaged with Wii Sports Resort when it debuts this spring, and the device will also be sold separately for an as-yet-unannounced price.

Wii Sports Resort

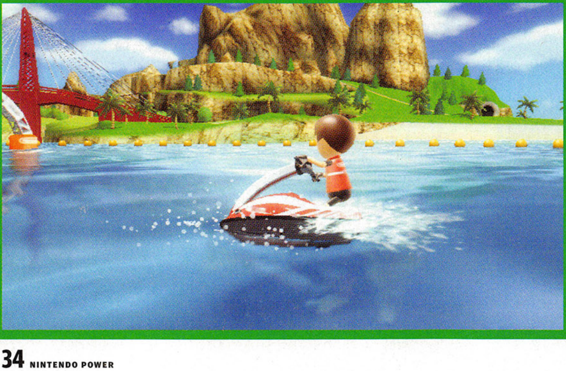
What better way to showcase Wii MotionPlus than with a follow-up to the game that sold millions of people on the Wii concept in the first place? Wii Sports Resort takes the same simple, pick-up-and-play approach as its predecessor and applies it to more than 10 new beach-themed events. Disc Dog has you tossing a Frisbee-style disc to your canine companion, Power Cruising puts you behind the handlebars of a personal watercraft, and Sword Play pits you in a duel against a friend as you try to knock each other into the water. The rest of the events haven't yet been revealed, but we're keeping our fingers crossed for Mii skinny-dipping.

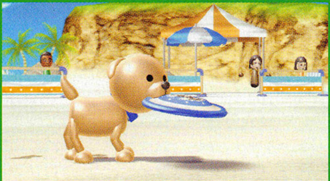
Red Steel 2

Though the game hasn't officially been announced, an Ubisoft executive let slip a few months ago that Red Steel 2 is indeed in development and that it will take advantage of Wii MotionPlus. The swordplay was one of the most highly touted yet ultimately disappointing aspects of the first game, so this definitely comes as happy news.

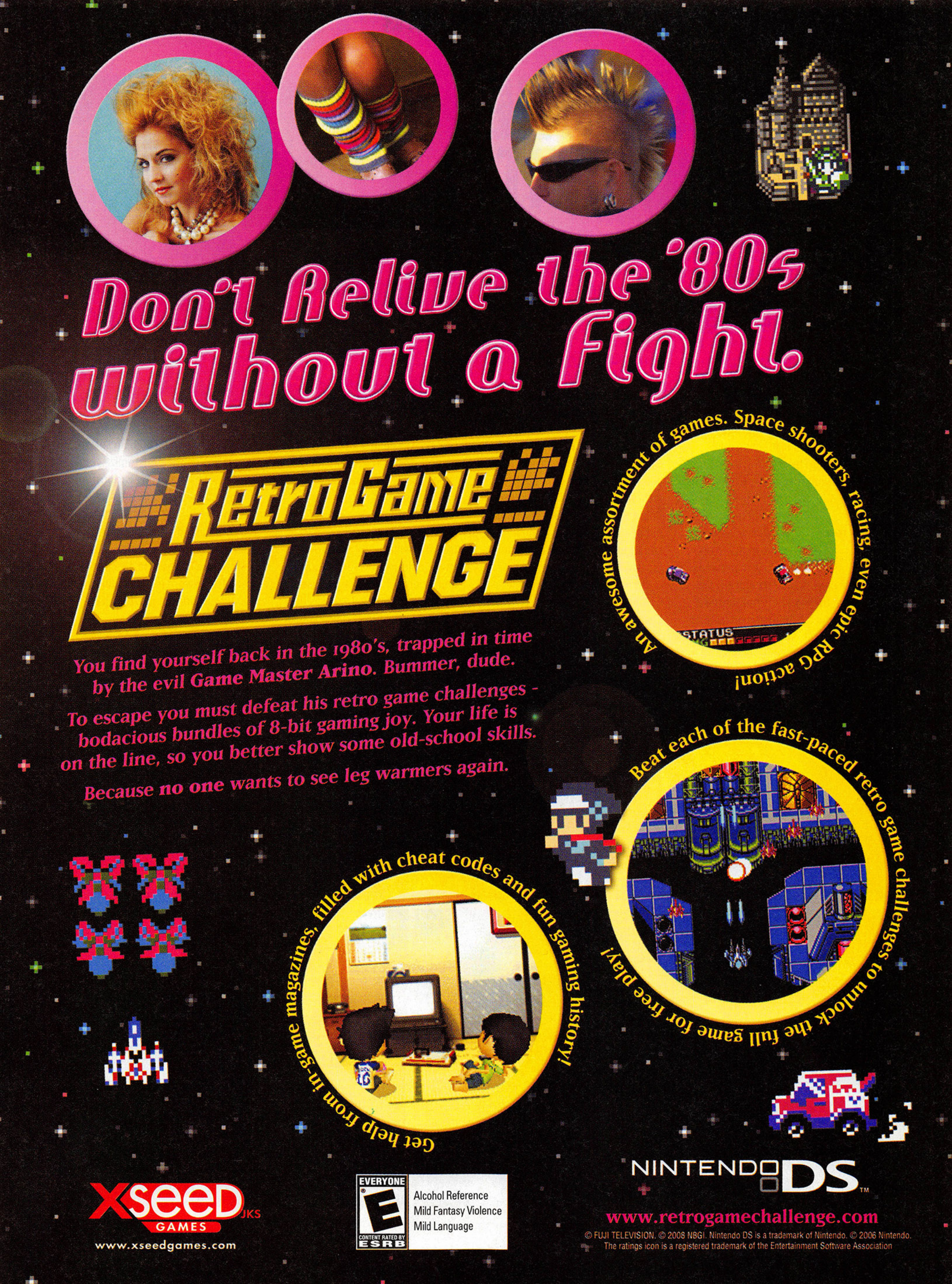
EA Sports Tennis

Aside from Nintendo, the first publisher to announce support for Wii MotionPlus was Electronic Arts with an all-new tennis franchise in development at the company's Vancouver studio. Details remain scarce on the still-untitled project, but EA claims to be focusing on the Wii version first (with other platforms to follow), and the company says it will include the sport's greatest venues, including the All England Lawn Tennis Club, home of Wimbledon.





#2 **CHRIS SL.'S PICK** I still play Wii Sports Bowling and Tennis, I love the beach, and I've been dying for the kinds of enhanced controls that the Wii MotionPlus will offer—this game was *made* for me!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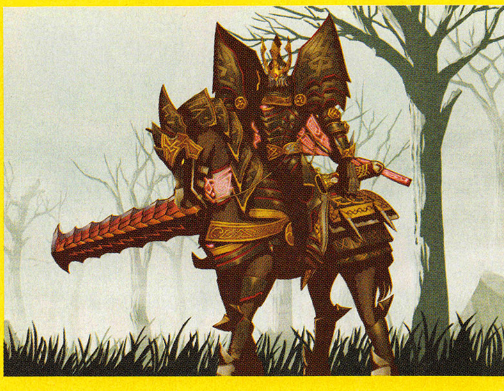
SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT



Don't mess with a hedgehog with a sword. Seriously. King Arthur—or at least a corrupt, evil version of him—is going to learn that the hard way when Sonic is summoned into his world (just as the Blue Blur is in the middle of a chili-dog feast, no less) and the two end up going blade-to-blade in Sonic and the Black Knight.

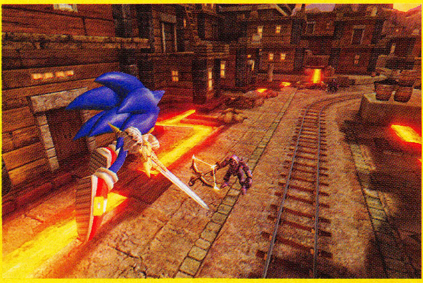
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SONIC TEAM**
RELEASE: **MARCH**

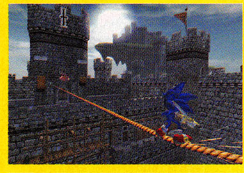
Wii

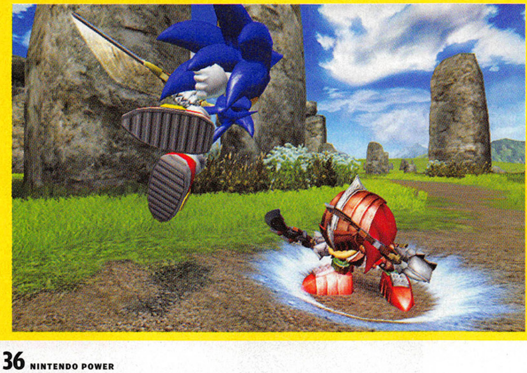
Even though Sonic's not exactly known for his prowess with edged weapons, he's an appropriately fast learner. You'll race through levels by moving via the nunchuk's Control Stick and jumping (and air-dashing) by pressing the A Button while dispatching foes with a mere flick of the Wii remote. And you'll have ample opportunity to do so. Like in previous Sonic games, platforming is a big part of the equation, but there's a much greater emphasis on combat this time out. Sonic's been getting by easy in past games compared to what's thrown at him in SBK—the enemies are plentiful, relentless, and pretty powerful, to boot. When your standard attacks aren't enough to ward off the menacing hordes, you can jump into the air to execute a diving kick or a spinning buzzsaw attack, or you can use your gauge-based Soul Surge special move by holding the B Button and shaking the remote, allowing for a series of deadly lock-on strikes or a blinding turbo-boost that can get the hedgehog out of almost any dangerous situation. If all else fails, you can block with Z.

On top of that, you've got three fighting styles to choose from. Cavalier style focuses on Sonic's trademark speed, Paladin style emphasizes strength, and Knight style balances the two. As you proceed through the game and earn stars based on your performance, you'll acquire new skills (some of which are carried over from Sonic and the Secret Rings) depending on the style you used to complete the level, such as the Paladin's shield-breaking ability or the Cavalier's wall-climbing Splash Jump. You can also customize your character by equipping various items that bestow offensive or defensive effects, such as making you immune to elemental status ailments. And did I mention that your sword happens to be a magical talking sword named Caliburn? That's gotta be helpful, too.

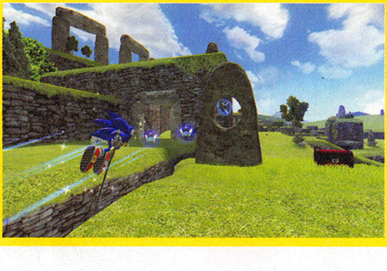
While the game gives the Sonic world a medieval makeover (Chao-like fairies represent gold rings and boost pads, for example), it still allows for plenty of variety in the settings. You'll learn swordplay basics in the Misty Lake area before advancing to stages such as Camelot Castle (a sizeable foe-filled stone fortress with a surrounding town), the Molten Mine (where you'll race through buildings, grind on mine-cart rails, smash through fiery boulders, and navigate deadly lava flows), and the Titanic Plain (a wide-open field packed with powerful enemies and Stonehenge-style rock constructs; your sword cuts the tall, wavy grass with every swipe). Each area has multiple missions—between six and

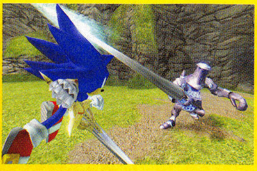


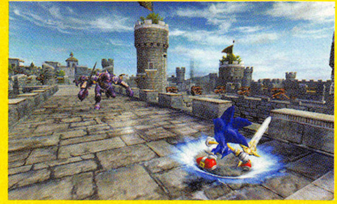




[Left] Is that Knuckles? Technically it's Sir Gawain, one of Arthur's knights.







[Below] Sonic charges up his Soul Surge attack to smite his foes.

nine per environment—and since there are two paths through the game, you won't visit some stages until subsequent playthroughs, providing plenty of replay value.

And it isn't just the levels that are based on Arthurian legend. Sonic's friends (rivals?) Knuckles, Shadow, and Blaze act as the Knights of the Round Table, and despite Arthur's turn for the worse, they'll support the king until you knock some sense into them in boss duals; although Sega hasn't revealed the specifics, they eventually become optional playable characters. Sonic's mutant-squirrel buddy Tails is there, too—he plays the part of the local blacksmith and helps you craft new goods from items you collect during your quest. The medieval theme is further emphasized by a chivalry rank, which is based on how you treat NPCs within the levels. Give them rings or display other acts of kindness, and you'll gain more followers, causing your rank to go up; slay them (accidentally or otherwise), and your rank will suffer.

In addition to the robust single-player mode, the game offers numerous multiplayer options, such as battle mode and survival mode, that allow up to four players to compete against one another or team up to fight CPU-controlled foes. There are also special solo missions designed specifically for ranked online challenges. In fact, it seems like there's very little Sega hasn't thought to include. In unfinished form, Sonic and the Black Knight is looking pretty promising; the only question is just how good the final game is going to be. With its March release on the horizon, we won't have to wait long to find out. **—CHRIS H.**

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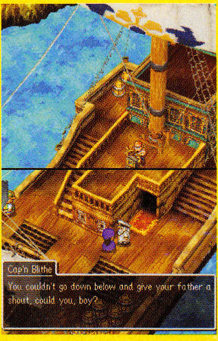
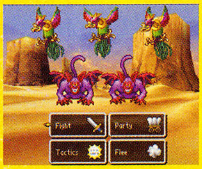
DRAGON QUEST V: HAND OF THE HEAVENLY BRIDE

Finally coming to North America for the first time, Dragon Quest V is one of the most lauded RPGs in the storied franchise. The game takes a unique approach to its storytelling: it begins with the hero as a young child, and follows him into adulthood, watching him grow up, get married, and start his own family. Naturally, there's plentiful monster-slaying and world-saving, too. **—CHRIS H.**



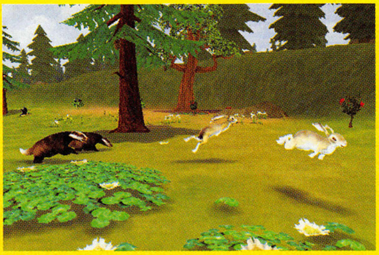
Cap'n Blithe

You couldn't go down below and give your father a shout, could you, boy?



PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **ARTE PIAZZA**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY**

DS



SIMANIMALS

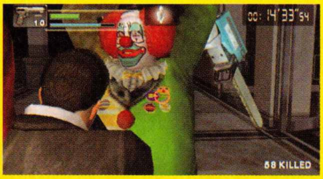
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
RELEASE: **JANUARY**

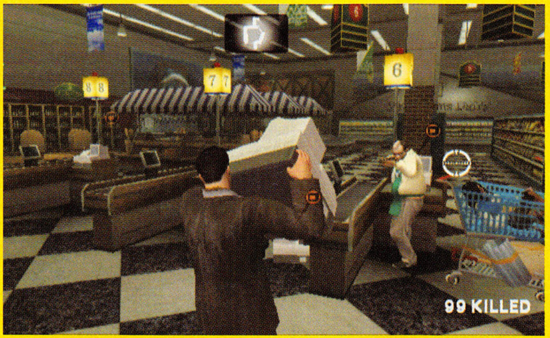
DS
Wii

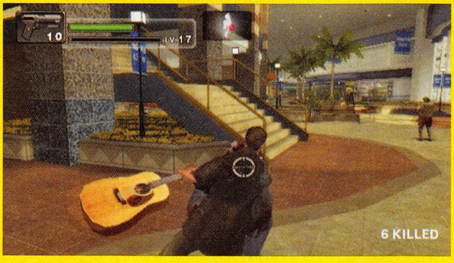
Have you ever wanted to mingle with badgers and bears but didn't want to deal with the peskiness of getting mauled? Now you can with SimAnimals. The game gives you full control over dozens of plants and 35 animal species, allowing you to build an idyllic natural habitat where you can attend to your furry/feathered friends' needs and wants...or you can tear the place apart if you so desire. **—CHRIS H.**

PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY**

Wii







DEAD RISING: CHOP TILL YOU DROP

A broom, a showerhead, a guitar, a car, a toy lightsab...uh, lightsword—it's all useful when you're trapped in a mall with an undead horde in the Wii-exclusive Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop. Of course, it takes more than just an eclectic array of weapons to interest people in a zombie game; you've got to have zombies, too. When we first saw Chop Till You Drop in action, there were a few zombies shuffling about onscreen, and we assumed that was the most we were going to get. Capcom's been working to address the zombie-less zombie game issue, and the undead count has increased considerably since then. Currently the number doesn't look quite like the hundred Capcom was aiming for, but it's still a lot—enough to make running through the mall to rescue people feel hazardous, at least. You definitely have to stock up on weapons and items before venturing out of the safety of the sealed security office (your home base), and assign armaments to the hotkeys on the Control Pad for easy access in the Resident Evil-style item menu—you might be confronted with anything from psychotic shop owners to zombified poodles and parrots. **—JUSTIN C.**

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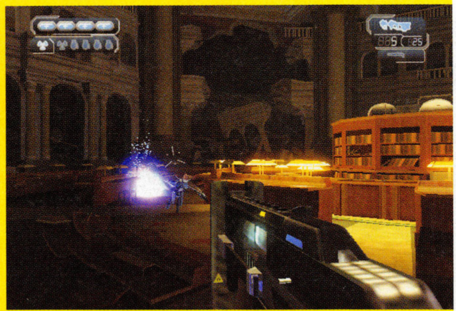
Wii

PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER:
HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE
RELEASE: **SPRING**

THE CONDUIT

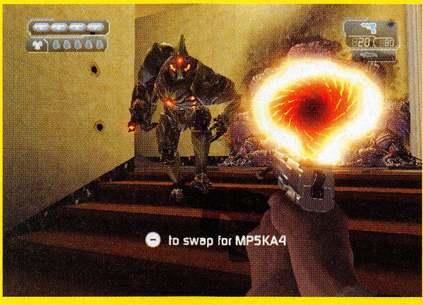


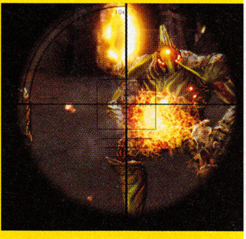
Looking to cement its position as a lead purveyor of Wii titles for core gamers, Sega has acquired the publishing rights to High Voltage Software's The Conduit. If what we've seen thus far is any indication, it should be a wise pickup for the house that Sonic built. This ultraimpressive first-person shooter pushes the Wii hardware to previously unseen heights. Each frame is drenched with advanced graphic techniques such as normal mapping and depth-of-field blur, and the astounding texture quality holds up to even the closest scrutiny. And despite all that technological wizardry, the action always holds steady at 30 frames per second.

Initially set in Washington D.C., The Conduit places you in the boots of Agent Ford, a member of the secretive Trust organization tasked with spearheading the resistance to a sudden and relentless alien invasion. The nation's capital proves an impactful setting—as you emerge from an underground bunker in one early level, you can see the Washington Monument crumbling in the distance before you're forced to storm the Lincoln Memorial, which the malevolent E.T.s have turned into a makeshift staging ground. We're told the game progresses to some other "interesting" places, but specific locales remain secret.

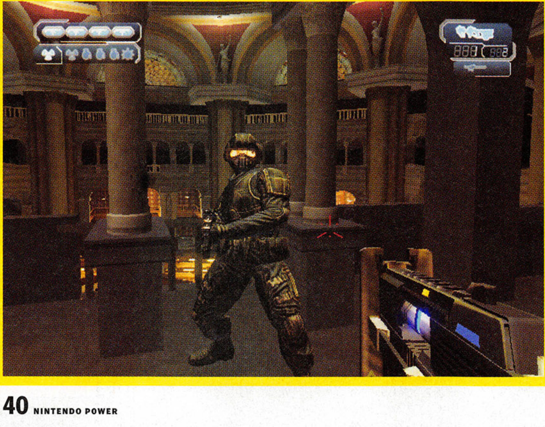
In addition to visual splendor, The Conduit offers the best FPS controls this side of a mouse and keyboard. That's because you can customize *everything*: button layout, look sensitivity, deadzone size, running speed, etc. All of these alterations can be made in real time without pausing the game, so you feel the effect of your tweaks instantly. It works brilliantly, and should serve as the new standard against which all Wii shooters are judged.

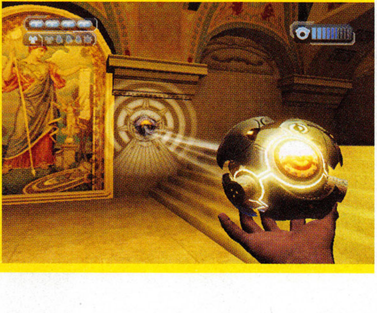
Of course, an FPS is only as good as its ordnance. Fortunately, The Conduit offers a wide assortment of both human and alien firearms. You've got machine guns, rocket launchers, Predator-esque laser blasters...even a 007-inspired pistol capable of killing an enemy with a single shot. Plus everything feels like it packs the appropriate punch, thanks in large part to some very meaty sound effects. Agent Ford also has in his arsenal a mysterious artifact called the All-Seeing Eye. This versatile tool unlocks certain mechanisms, hacks into computer networks, and reveals hidden traps and secret corridors. Though the ASE's use leads to some light puzzle elements, The Conduit's primary focus is on providing what the developers call "moment-to-moment gameplay"—satisfying bursts of action without too much lull in between. It's that thoughtful approach to pacing that stands to elevate the experience beyond a mere showcase for High Voltage's (incredibly impressive) technical achievements. Some very ambitious online plans are also in the works. Consider us optimistic. **—STEVE T.**





[Above] Unless you destroy those glowing portals, the aliens will keep pouring out.





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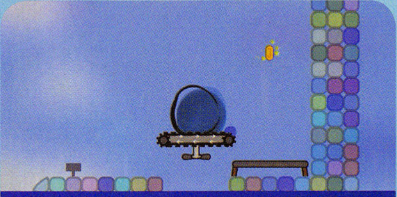

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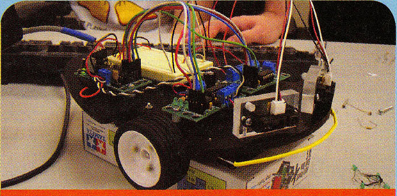

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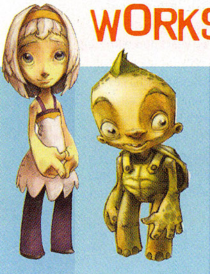

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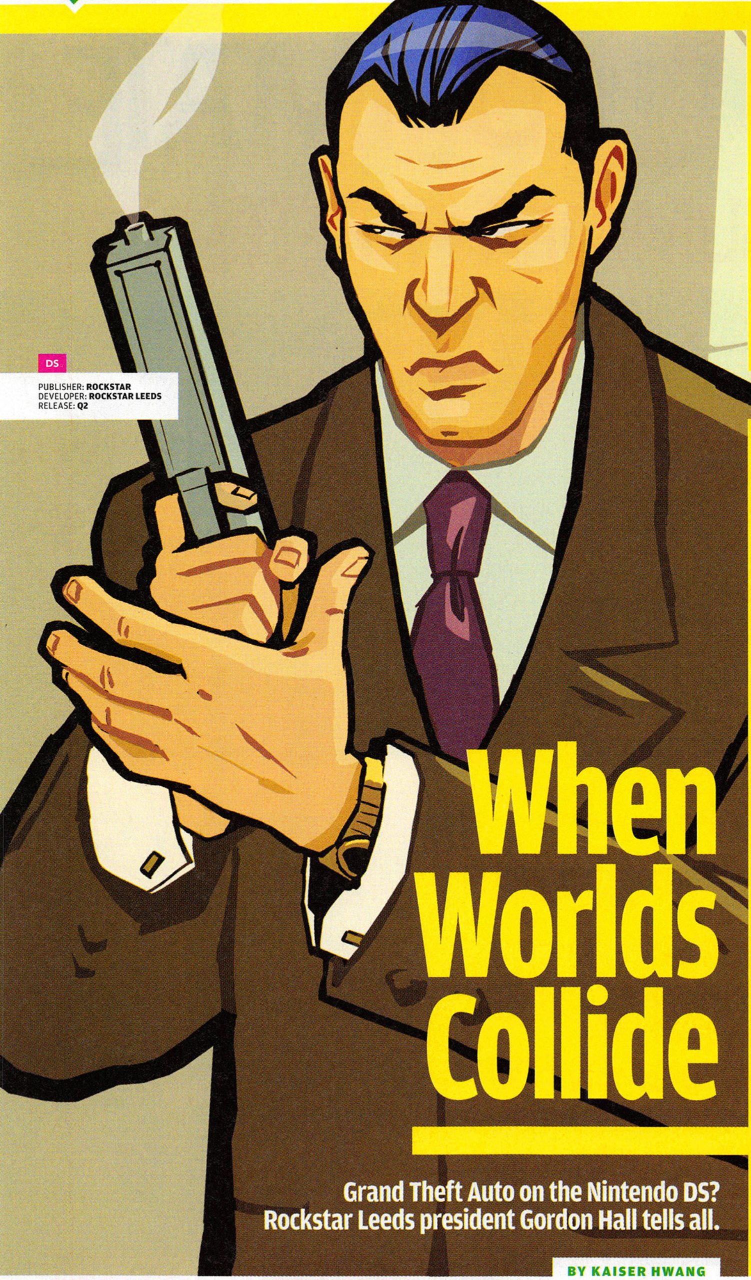


When Worlds Collide

Grand Theft Auto on the Nintendo DS? Rockstar Leeds president Gordon Hall tells all.

BY KAISER HWANG

DS

PUBLISHER: **ROCKSTAR**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR LEEDS**
RELEASE: **Q2**

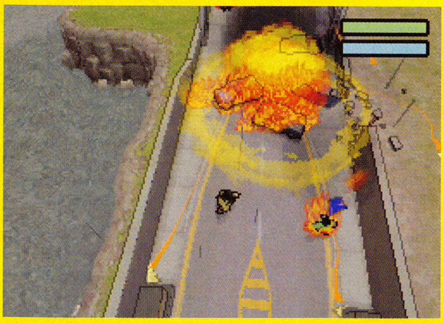
There are good handheld developers, and then there are great handheld developers. Rockstar Leeds, Rockstar Games's handheld-only division, is establishing itself as the latter. M-rated GTA: Chinatown Wars is the studio's first game for the DS, and from what we've seen and played, it's very impressive. To get a better idea of how they're squeezing a full GTA experience onto the DS, we had a chat with the studio's president.

NINTENDO POWER When the idea to make GTA on the DS came up, what were the first thoughts in your head?

GORDON HALL We mainly wondered about how to make something that felt like a modern GTA game based on our experience of making the PSP GTAs and working with Rockstar North, and how much we would be able to get the platform to do. But it was also exciting. There are fairly obvious things that the DS hardware can do that the PSP can't, with regards to user input, and there were all kinds of ideas flying around. I knew right from the start this was going to be our hardest project to date. We needed the gameplay to be instant, obvious, and fun. This meant keeping to the game design and production ideals that surround GTA whilst moving to a more arcade-type feel, faster gameplay, and a really slick frame rate were going to be imperative. We knew it was going to be tough, but the prize was going to be worth the sweat.

How long has GTA: Chinatown Wars been in development?

The game has been in development for two years now with a big team. This is by far the biggest game Rockstar Leeds has ever done. I remember the conversation I had with Sam [Houser, Rockstar's co-founder and president] that kicked this all off. We both felt the DS community was being starved of mature content,



Fast cars, big explosions, and shady characters? This is definitely GTA.

but no third-party publishers were making headway on the platform. There was no previous business model that showed anything other than abject failure in the adult DS space. We came away from that chat with a target to get something onscreen that would really change the perception of the DS and the games it's capable of making. If we thought after the initial test phase it had potential, then we would back it and hope we could do what Rockstar always tries to do and create new markets. If, though, it looked like we couldn't really impress people and excite them about something new, then we would pull the plug straight away.

Sam has a great way of motivating people; it's all about clarity of vision. He's very passionate and the most driven man I know. At Rockstar, it's very obvious we must spend our time creating great games [and] nothing else. Many times over the development of this game I've spent whole weeks sitting in a room with Sam with the blinds drawn, ear to ear poring over every detail of this game. I'm pretty sure this kind of thing just doesn't happen at most other companies—certainly at none I've worked at. Rockstar doesn't pump out "product"—we try to make high-quality games. Our catalog is small and of high quality. When you are working on a game series such as Grand Theft Auto, you have to respect its history, the strides the game has made in this industry. I feel happy we are adding to the history of this series. Of course, the final test is the fans that play our titles. We believe that the GTA fans out there will love the game, but I also hope we can gather in a new set of gamers in the many people out there who only play DS games, but who are looking for something a little different.

What we've seen of the game is really impressive. How much are you straining the DS hardware to make Chinatown Wars?

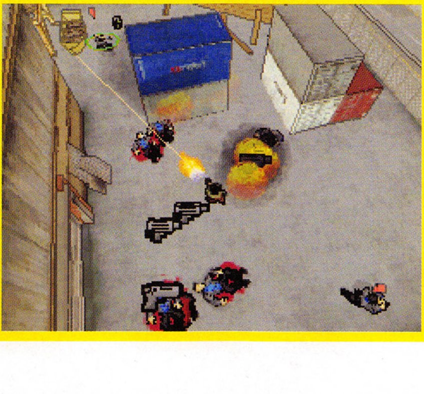
Well, we're doing things that some very talented console developers haven't pulled off! We have a full open-world city with lighting and time-of-day shadows dynamically cast by every structure in the world. That's just one example. The physics system is fantastic; the cars can be destroyed piece-by-piece. The population of the city is also incredible; the place is just so busy. We have stressed the machine to its breaking point. For the last six months we have been constantly out of memory and cartridge space; it's been painful but a lot of fun squeezing in feature after feature. We hope you can see the love that has gone into it when you play it.

Can you give us some examples of new touch-screen mini-games?

Well, in one mission the player is told to take out targets from a distance, and when they get to their destination they find a briefcase with the parts of a sniper rifle inside it. It's such a great feeling constructing the rifle from the parts in the case. It is a great use of the touch screen and feels like an integral GTA moment.

Can you take us through and describe one of your favorite missions?

Chan (one of the guys hoping to become Triad leader) has been betrayed by some guys he thought he could trust. He wants revenge. He knows the conspirators are having a meeting on Happiness Island, and has loaded a helicopter up with Molotov cocktails. He flies out, with Huang (the player) in the back, and you spend the next five ▸



minutes raining Molotovs down on Chan's enemies as they try and fight back or escape. It's pretty much pure Chinatown Wars—over-the-top, very funny, and pushes the DS to its limits.

Can you talk about some features that you wanted in the game, but had to be cut due to the hardware restrictions?
There's very little that we wanted to do but couldn't. Everything I think of that was brought up but hasn't made it into the final version was dropped because it just didn't feel right within our game. The only things that stand out were due to cartridge size restrictions more than the limits of the platform itself—full cut-scene voice acting, fully animated cut-scenes—though I think what we have now with the animated comic-book look probably fits in better—and obviously with this being GTA you can always do with more space to add more to the radio!

What features do you feel are at the heart of every GTA game?
I think for me the core of GTA is, "when you're not playing missions, are you still having fun?" If moving around the city and interacting with it when you have no set goal from the game is enjoyable, then the game will be great. When we were working on Chinatown Wars, building it from scratch, there was a point when everything came together and you could hear people around the office laughing and enjoying themselves while they were playing missions or testing new features. When you're meant to be testing a mission but some random guy carjacks you and you make it your own personal goal to make him pay, and suddenly revenge on that AI guy becomes more important to you than the mission, that's when you know what you've got in your hands is GTA.

What are you most proud of in Chinatown Wars?
I guess I am very proud that everything a player would expect of a GTA game is there. There is nothing that we wanted but don't have. I also believe with this game we have set a new standard for what can be achieved on this platform. This is a huge game; every piece of it has been lovingly crafted. This is the best game our studio has made, so the thing I'm most proud of is the team that created it—both at Leeds and the guys throughout all of Rockstar that played such an important role in bringing it to life.

In terms of scope, where do you think Chinatown Wars falls in comparison to, say, one of the PSP games?
Chinatown Wars is much bigger than anything we have ever done before: more odd jobs, deeper missions, and more moments of over-the-top action. We have a huge interaction with the Rockstar Social Club, a massive [narcotics trafficking] game that would stand alone on its own. The list goes on and on; this thing is huge. We are very proud of all of the PSP games we have made, especially the two GTA games, but this game is far bigger.

Is there anything you can tell us about the game that no one knows yet, or would be surprised to learn?
Some details of how to lose a wanted rating have already been released—that you smash up cop cars until there are no more chasing you. But you can also smash up the police helicopters that chase you if you can find a stunt jump and hit one with your car as you're flying through the air. Seeing a guy pull that off really sums up what we were going for in this game.

Why did you decide to specialize in portable hardware?
We are a pretty technical studio;

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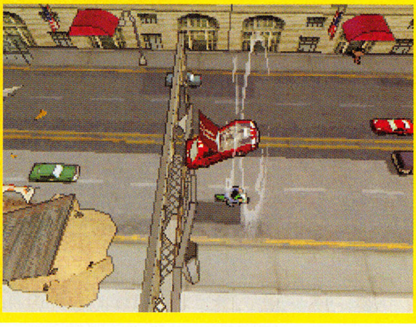


I do believe we have some of the most talented staff in the world under our roof, especially when it comes to getting great performance out of hardware with strict power limitations. I think as we were getting going, we felt most developers and publishers hadn't seen the true potential of handheld gaming, especially in Europe—it tended to be mostly second-rate teams and companies. We knew we could step into that arena and create truly astounding games that would be well-received by gamers. You only have to look at the hardware charts to see how big handheld gaming has become. I think we're fast approaching 80 million DS units worldwide; that's bigger than any other current console, while the PSP has also done really well.

Do you feel portable hardware has any strengths over standard console hardware?

Yes, as a developer we can get the content onscreen faster and we can change the gameplay quicker because we get many more iterations of gameplay tweaks during development than our console brothers do. The turnaround on handhelds is far faster than console development. This is a huge thing for us. It allows us to play the game and have the game tell us where it needs to go. Also, there's something amazing about being able to pack a whole world into a little box in your hands. We're used to seeing big stuff on our TV sets, but when you can put a living Liberty City into your pocket—that's something really cool.

What are some lessons you learned from PSP, or even GBA development that have helped you work on the DS?

Never believe received wisdom on what a piece of hardware is capable of! We've always come from the direction of having the ideas first, then bending the hardware to our will. If you want to make a great handheld game it should never be about compromise.

Are there any DS games that have impressed you from a technical standpoint?

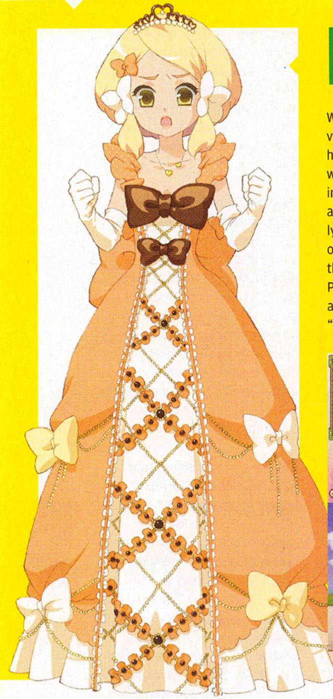
I've enjoyed quite a few DS games—Hotel Dusk and Professor Layton and the Curious Village were particular favorites—but I think [The Legend of] Zelda: Phantom Hourglass is the only DS game I've played that really seemed to be pushing the platform at all. That's what we have tried to achieve with Chinatown Wars—a complete experience on the DS.

Do you see Rockstar Leeds ever making a home-console game?

Probably not. We are specialists—we fit big things into small spaces. The console space isn't for us, and the rest of the Rockstar family has some of the best teams in the world working on console and PC games, so we fit well into the company structure. I'm more than happy looking forward to the next round of handheld hardware; it's a joy squeezing every last ounce out of them.

What one feeling would you like players to come away with after playing Chinatown Wars?

I'd like them to feel like they've just experienced something new, different, and unexpected. But mostly I expect they will just feel like they have numb fingers from spending too long playing a brilliant game.



DS

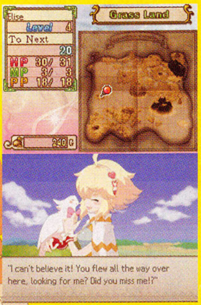
PUBLISHER:
ATLUS
DEVELOPER:
GLOBAL A
RELEASE:
FEBRUARY

MY WORLD, MY WAY

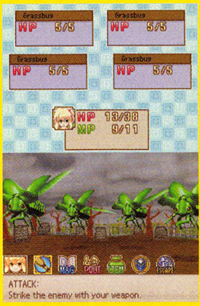
When a narcissistic princess ventures out on a quest to prove herself, usually you can guess what comes next: painful lessons in humility, touching revelations about respecting others, and finally, a grand sacrifice for the good of the world. Amazingly, none of that happens in My World, My Way. Princess Elise doesn't need to learn a lesson—she's so good at being "cute, rich, and self-absorbed" that she can pout and cajole her way through the entire quest. Her complaints are so forceful that they can actually rewrite game code, transforming plains to forests ("I hate this area!"), and unkillable monsters into low-level chum ("The monsters stink!"). And if she does die, she can even complain away the penalty—when prompted to choose between losing experience and losing gold, you can spend your pout points on "Both of those stink!" and get off scot-free.

My World, My Way is both an innovative RPG and a send-up of the entire genre. The game begins in an area simply called "The First Town," and Princess Elise makes it clear to bosses that she's only killing them for the experience points. The fundamentals of the game are nothing you haven't seen a million times before, with frequent random battles and simple fetch quests. But My World, My Way heads off your criticisms by giving your heroine the ability to vocalize them—and actually change things. Don't want to deal with another random encounters? Have Elise announce, "This is annoying!" to make it go away. Bored with another stupid fetch quest? A perfect pout can end it in an instant.

You don't have to buy My World, My Way when it hits store shelves February 3rd, but I'd be afraid of what Elise might do to you if you don't. **—CHRIS H.**



"I can't believe it! You flew all the way over here, looking for me? Did you miss me!?"



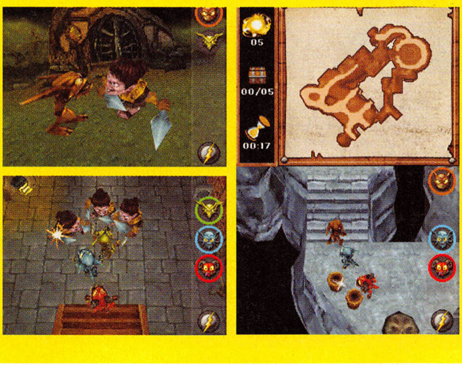
ATTACK:
Strike the enemy with your weapon.

PUBLISHER:
CODEMASTERS
DEVELOPER:
CLIMAX STUDIOS
RELEASE: **Q2-Q3**

DS

OVERLORD MINIONS

A spin-off of the 2007 PS3 and Xbox 360 game, Overlord Minions has you commanding a squad of four gremlin-like creatures named Giblet, Blaze, Stench, and Zap. Each of your minions has unique abilities—Giblet's the melee fighter, whereas Stench has an arsenal of fart-based attacks, for example—that you'll use to combat foes and solve puzzles in this touch screen-centric adventure. **—JUSTIN C.**



PUNCH-OUT!!

Forget all of those other goofy, cartoony boxing games—Punch-Out!! is the real deal. Instead of the sporadic, wonky punch animations that have KO'd many similar games, the blows in the classic arcade, NES, and SNES Punch-Out!! titles were crisp and oh-so-satisfying. The new Wii iteration adds motion control to the series' traditional gameplay of memorizing each opponent's unique attack patterns to find openings for counterpunches. We'd love to show you much more of this game, but that will have to wait a little while. Keep an eye out in future issues! **—CHRIS SL.**

Wii

PUBLISHER:
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER:
NEXT LEVEL GAMES
RELEASE:
TBD

1:08
ROUND 1
VS.

#1 CHRIS SL.'S PICK

The NES and SNES Punch-Out!! games are two of my all-time favorite Nintendo classics. It's about time this series got back in the ring!

#3 JUSTIN C.'S PICK

I've been waiting 14 years for a new Punch-Out!! game, so suffice it to say that I'm very excited about this Wii title.

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WORLD TOUR™
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DEEP SEA FISHING
Escape
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Combo 04
MULTI-PLAYER BATTLE
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P1
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P3
P4
02:04
REAL-LIFE CONTROLS
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Break
NICE
Combo 02

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E
Mild Language
Langage grossier
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www.esrb.org
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nintendo Wi-Fi connection
Wii™

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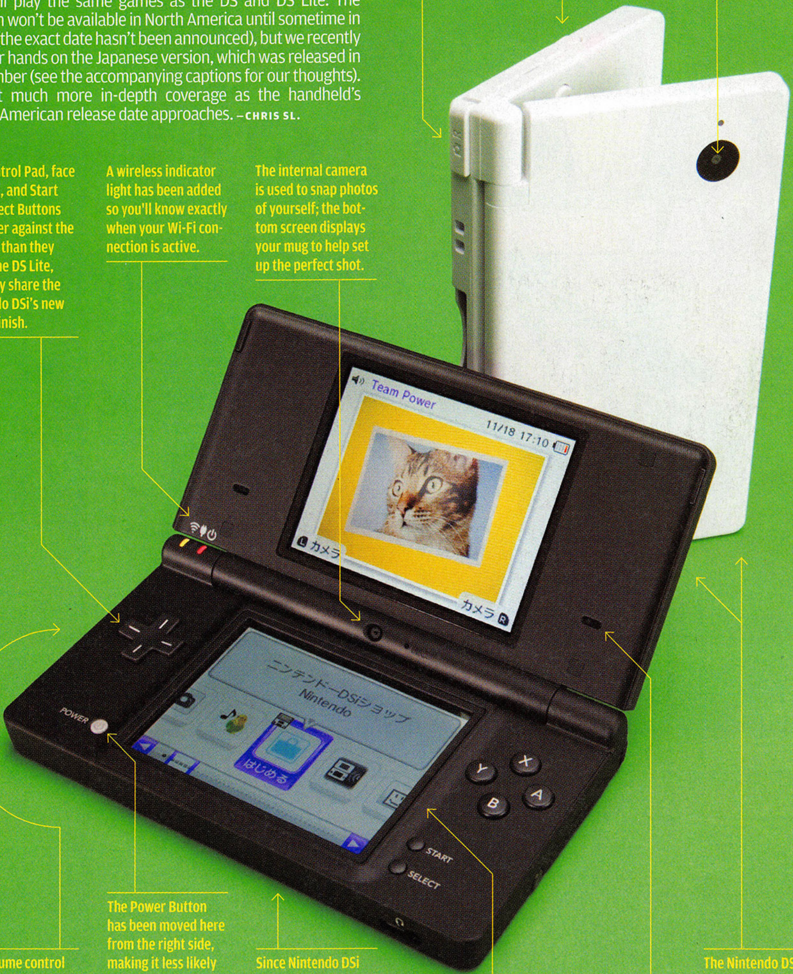
NINTENDO DSi

MANUFACTURER:
NINTENDO
RELEASE:
TBD

One of the biggest stories of 2009 will undoubtedly be the Nintendo DSi, the third iteration of the wildly successful handheld. It will feature numerous new features, but the Nintendo DSi will play the same games as the DS and DS Lite. The system won't be available in North America until sometime in 2009 (the exact date hasn't been announced), but we recently got our hands on the Japanese version, which was released in November (see the accompanying captions for our thoughts). Expect much more in-depth coverage as the handheld's North American release date approaches. —CHRIS SL.



The L and R Buttons let you take photos, as evidenced by the camera icons that now adorn them.

Any standard SD card can be inserted in this slot to store music and downloadable games and apps.

The low-res cameras aren't meant for serious photography, but rather for goofy fun using built-in editing software.

The Control Pad, face buttons, and Start and Select Buttons lie flatter against the surface than they do on the DS Lite, and they share the Nintendo DSi's new matte finish.

A wireless indicator light has been added so you'll know exactly when your Wi-Fi connection is active.

The internal camera is used to snap photos of yourself; the bottom screen displays your mug to help set up the perfect shot.

The volume control has been moved from the bottom to the left side (not shown here), and has been changed from a slider to a button.

The Power Button has been moved here from the right side, making it less likely to hit by accident. Tapping the button returns you to the main menu, and holding it powers down the handheld.

Since Nintendo DSi doesn't have a Game Boy Advance cartridge slot, you'll still need a DS Lite to use GBA cartridges and some DS peripherals.

The new main menu has a layout similar to Wii's channels, with plenty of slots for apps and games.

The speakers look different from before and sound a little better.

The Nintendo DSi sports a smooth matte finish that doesn't reflect light or smudge as easily as the DS Lite's glossy surface.

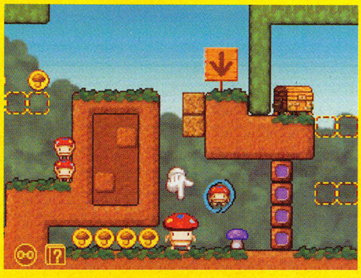
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK MADEO

BOING! DOCOMODAKE

DS

PUBLISHER: **IGNITION**
DEVELOPER: **AQ INTERACTIVE**
RELEASE: **MARCH**

Boing! Docomodake has a pretty weird premise. You control a waddling mushroom (who happens to be a Japanese phone-company mascot) that can split itself into smaller mushrooms and then use its separate pieces in various ways—throwing them as weapons or using them as steps, for example. It makes for a curious but interesting action-puzzle game. **—CHRIS H.**

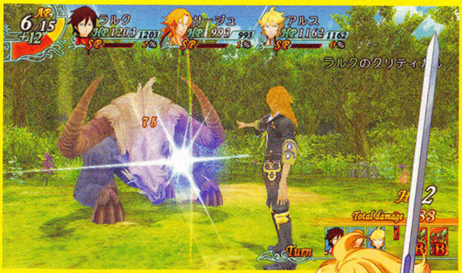


PERSONAL TRAINER: MATH
PERSONAL TRAINER: WALKING

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO (WALKING), JUPITER (MATH)**
RELEASE: **TBD**

DS

Math and walking aren't exactly the most exciting activities around, but they'll be given the Nintendo touch in separate upcoming installments of the Personal Trainer series for DS (which recently kicked off with Personal Trainer: Cooking). What the titles lack in sexiness they should make up for in functionality; Personal Trainer: Walking features a pedometer to help you measure your physical activity. **—CHRIS H.**



ARC RISE FANTASIA

Wii

PUBLISHER: **XSEED/ MARVELOUS USA**
DEVELOPER: **IMAGEEPOCH**
RELEASE: **SPRING**

While most of the role-playing genre's heavy hitters are setting their sights on DS, Wii is getting a brand-new swords-and-sorcery quest that shows considerable promise. With its lovely vistas, scenario penned by the script writer for Tales of Symphonia, deep strategic battle system, and soundtrack helmed by famed composer Yasunori Mitsuda, Arc Rise Fantasia seems to have all the ingredients of a great RPG. We'll just have to see how they come together. **—STEVE T.**

INFINITE SPACE

Intergalactic strategy-RPG Infinite Space lets you create a fleet from nearly 150 different ship types, customizing each vessel as you see fit with a huge selection of weaponry and equipment. You can also recruit crew members whose talents and personalities affect your ships' performance during the game's turn-based battles. All of this takes place against what the developers promise will be an epic story. A US release date has yet to be announced, but we'll continue following this one closely. **—STEVE T.**

PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **PLATINUMGAMES/ NUDE MAKER**
RELEASE: **TBD**

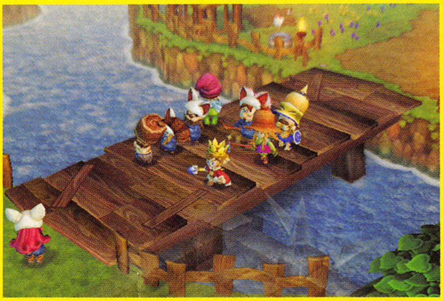
DS

LITTLE KING'S STORY

Wii
PUBLISHER: **XSEED/ MARVELOUS USA**
DEVELOPER: **CING/TOWN FACTORY**
RELEASE: **Q1**

You might think being king means living a life of ease and luxury, but that's not necessarily the case. Take Little King's Story, for example: you play a young lad who rules over the Alpoko Kingdom, but you have an empty treasury and a 100 percent unemployment rate, and the entirety of your domain consists of four citizens, three advisors, and three cows. Luckily, you've also got a magic crown that makes everyone do your bidding, so it's up to you to command your townsfolk to gather valuables, fight enemies, build structures, and generally expand your kingdom into a place of great people and great deeds.

Though you're always in the thick of the action, the gameplay is somewhat like Pikmin in that you don't do the work yourself, but rather you make your followers do it for you by guiding them to the proper objectives. As you earn cash and defeat UMA (unidentified mysterious animals), you'll be able to construct new buildings and teach your carefree citizens new jobs, such as soldier (for close-quarters fighting), farmer (to gain expertise in digging), carpenter (for building things), and hunter (to skillfully wield a bow). Eventually you'll expand your influence beyond your municipality and get to visit and conquer a variety of outside kingdoms. It's all done with a wry sense of humor and an astonishing amount of charm, and it could be one of the most uniquely fun titles on Wii as long as the control issues that we experienced get ironed out. We checked in with producer Yoshiro Kimura to learn what we'll encounter when Little King's Story arrives early in the year. —**CHRIS H.**



INTERVIEW WITH PRODUCER YOSHIRO KIMURA

NINTENDO POWER We only recently learned that you can venture to kingdoms outside your own. What will players encounter when they go to other kingdoms?

YOSHIRO KIMURA There's a whole lot you'll see. Just traveling to them—on the way there you will encounter a lot of different areas. Not just dark dungeons, but you'll be in some brightly lit areas as well. And there's an area that's even sort of like hell, a little bit. But keep in mind, it's still made very cute! I think that having cute-looking characters rather than realistic-looking characters doing bad things is scarier and more fun.

You've mentioned before that you like making games that are cute. Why is that important to you?

It's because, if you ask me the reason that I make games, it's to spread love and peace. [laughs] I'm serious! I really think of games as the medium for spreading love and peace. I was involved with No More Heroes as well [as the producer at Marvelous], and No More Heroes is ultraviolent—you've got heads popping off, blood everywhere—but it's also funny in a way, and that is also a form of entertainment, and an important form of entertainment, but you need the cute [end of the] spectrum as well.

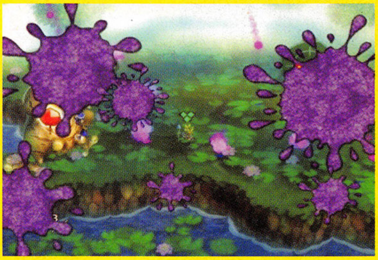
So far we've seen soldiers and farmers and carpenters. What other jobs can you assign your people?

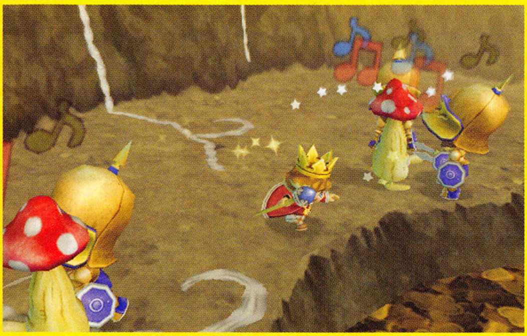
There's a merchant. The merchant is searching for precious goods out there. And though you've seen the soldier, that was just the very lowest grunt soldier. There is a level above him and there is a level above that as well. And there's a medic.

Are there any gesture-based controls?

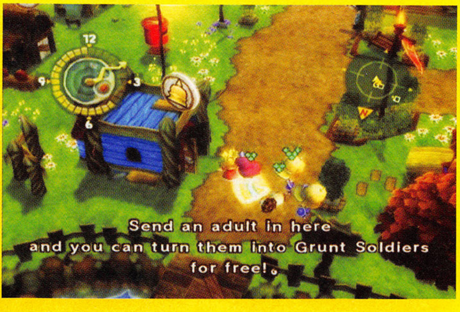
Just because it's for the Wii, I don't want to force motion controls in there. It has to be a good fit for the game, and I'm concentrating on a good, fun game first. Now that we have the main game established,

What's that purple stuff all over the screen? It's an attack from one of the game's early bosses. The giant frog covers the screen with goop, making it tricky to avoid his poisonous attacks.





[Right] You can assign jobs to your citizens after building the appropriate type of structure.



Send an adult in here and you can turn them into Grunt Soldiers for free!

寝不足はお肌の大敵……おやすみなさい、王様！

we're looking to see any other unique ways that we can take advantage of the Wii, and when we think of the Wii, we think of more than one player a lot of times. So we are looking into possibly having a second player come in and trying to help in some way. But keep in mind this will be a very minor part of the game if we are able to implement it. And maybe at that point, there's something we could do with motion controls. We're still trying it, and I'd like to have this feature in the final game, but we're still not sure.

Some aspects of the game seem similar to Pikmin. Was that an influence at all?

No! To tell you the truth, I really don't play that many games, but I love movies, I love manga, and maybe older games, but recently, especially when I'm making a game, it's not that I'm making it a point not to look at other games, but I just tend not to look at what else is going on out there. So what I concentrate on is following my original vision, and what I want to create, and trying to make a good experience for the player.

So what's the deal with the cows? Your knight rides a cow, you fight evil cows, the enemies ride cows. What's up with that?

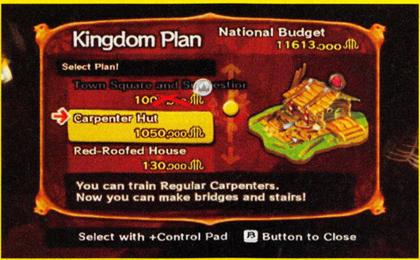
That actually started as a joke that I implemented on my side. Basically when [executive producer and Harvest Moon creator Yasuhiro] Wada and I decided to start working together about three years ago, I said, "How come everything you guys do have these cows in it? Your Harvest Moon series always has these cows. Can't you do anything other than a Harvest Moon-type series?" So now that he's doing something different than Harvest Moon with Marvelous, I'm throwing in the cows sort of like a joke.

Why did you decide to incorporate classical music into the game? What does that add?

[Hums] When I first thought of the game and the concept, that's the music that was in my head. It's Bolero—that music I was humming just there—and I envisioned a line of people marching to that music. So when we finally sat down and had a meeting to discuss the music in the game, I explained that same thing to the team, and so we all decided we might as well just go in that direction.

Is there anything you want to say to our readers about why they should look forward to playing Little King's Story?

It's taken a little bit of time for us to complete the development process, but rest assured, all that time was to ensure that the game is very good, very fun to play, and polished at the end. So please, I would like to have everybody try it out and see for themselves.



Kingdom Plan

National Budget
11613.000

Select Plan!

Town Square and S[illegible]estion
100[illegible]

Carpenter Hut
1050.000

Red-Roofed House
130.000

You can train Regular Carpenters.
Now you can make bridges and stairs!

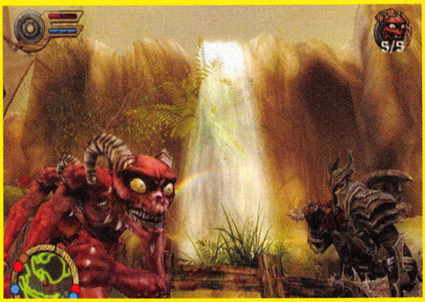
Select with +Control Pad
Button to Close

You'll collect treasure and fight monsters until the cows come home, then you'll celebrate by watching fireworks with the cows.

おうおう、王様、ごきげんうるわしゅうー。
って俺もだいぶ大臣っぽくね？

OVERLORD DARK LEGEND

Once upon a time, before the events of the 2007 Xbox 360 original, there was a young Overlord. To rule over his lands and the population of fairy-tale beings, including a man made of gingerbread and a little girl with a red riding hood, this tyrant used his gesture-based abilities to exercise even more control over his army of minions than ever before: for example, he could use the remote to pick up one of the gremlin-esque creatures, then shake it and suffuse it with magical power to transform his underling into an explosive projectile. This Overlord's quest was not without humor, however, as it was penned by Rhianna Pratchett, a longtime scribe of video games, who took satirical liberties with the fairy-tale cameos. Whether the Overlord lived happily ever after is something left to be discovered when coverage of his adventures continues in a future issue. **—JUSTIN C.**

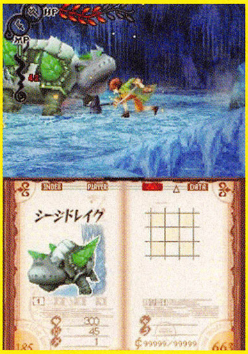


PUBLISHER:
CODEMASTERS
DEVELOPER:
CLIMAX STUDIOS
RELEASE: **Q2-Q3**
Wii

AVALON CODE

PUBLISHER: **XSEED/ MARVELOUS USA**
DEVELOPER: **MATRIX SOFTWARE**
RELEASE: **MARCH**
DS

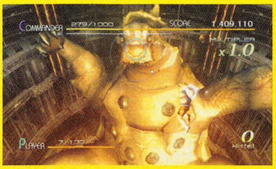
The world of Avalon Code is doomed. You can't fight it, so instead your mission is to use the Book of Prophecy to determine what is worth saving when the world is reborn. It's more than an intriguing story—you use the book to understand and manipulate the things you encounter in the game. For example, you can remove an elemental attribute from an item and add it to your weapon, or introduce poison to an otherwise-unstoppable monster to make it weak. Excellent visuals, a deep real-time combat system, and a romantic subplot add up to a wholly innovative RPG. **—CHRIS H.**

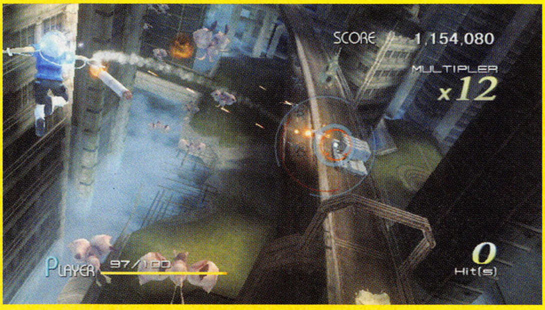


SIN AND PUNISHMENT 2

Wii
PUBLISHER:
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER:
TREASURE
RELEASE: **TBD**

Though the original Nintendo 64 cartridge never made it to these shores, Sin and Punishment has garnered a devoted following in the US among importers and those who downloaded the game on Virtual Console. It's among the finest offerings from one of the premier action-game studios in the business, so news of a sequel coming to Wii is cause for celebration. Sin and Punishment 2 looks to deliver the same brand of high-octane, on-rails mayhem, with the added benefit of targeting via the Wii remote. The only sin here is how long Nintendo is making us wait for more details. **—STEVE T.**





#3 STEVE T.'S PICK First we get a new Klonoa then Treasure reveals Sin and Punishment 2. Will wonders never cease? I must have been a very good boy recently.

#1 JUSTIN C.'S PICK The original is one of my all-time favorite N64 games, so it goes without saying that I'm psyched about this sequel.

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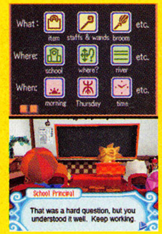
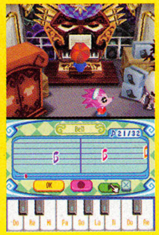

What: item staffs & wands broom etc.
Where: school where? river etc.
When: morning Thursday time etc.
School Principal

That was a hard question, but you understood it well. Keep working.



LITTLE MAGICIAN'S MAGIC ADVENTURE

School isn't always the most exciting place to spend your day, but what if you went to the Magic Academy? That's the idea behind Little Magician's Magic Adventure: you are a magician-in-training, hanging out with your fellow students and learning spells as you explore a world that changes from day to night in real time, à la Animal Crossing. **—JUSTIN C.**

PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY**

DS

Wii

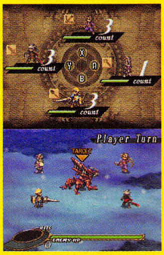
PUBLISHER:
CAPCOM
DEVELOPER:
BIONIC GAMES
RELEASE: **TBD**

SPYBORGS

Though Capcom announced Spyborgs a while ago, the game has remained in hiding ever since, and with good reason—it evidently is being significantly retooled and will bear little resemblance to what's been shown thus far, other than that you'll be controlling superpowered secret agents. With former Insomniac (makers of Ratchet & Clank) staffers helming development, we remain optimistic. **—CHRIS H.**

VALKYRIE PROFILE: COVENANT OF THE PLUME

While the Norse-mythology-inspired Valkyrie Profile has never had the wide recognition of some of Square Enix's other franchises, it's always been lauded for having a unique, enjoyable battle system. This key aspect has been made more strategic for the first DS entry, Covenant of the Plume: you'll get bonuses for arranging your characters in specific configurations during a battle. **—JUSTIN C.**



DS

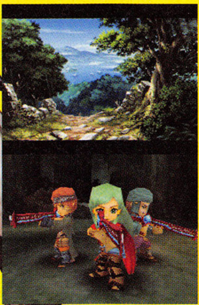
PUBLISHER:
SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER:
TRI-ACE
RELEASE:
MARCH

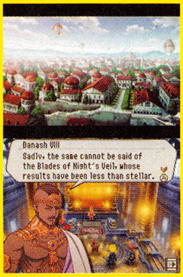
PUBLISHER:
KONAMI
DEVELOPER:
KONAMI
RELEASE: **Q1**

DS

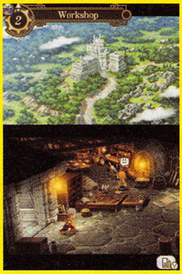
SUIKODEN: TIERKREIS

RPGs are in no short supply on DS, but Suikoden: Tierkreis has all the components to be one of the best. The game retains many of the key elements of its console predecessors—including a vast number of playable characters, an ever-expanding castle base, and an intriguing plot rife with twists and betrayal—and delivers them in convenient portable form. And although some of the series' trademarks are missing, Tierkreis goes in bold, new directions with a tale of parallel worlds and the inclusion of Wi-Fi character sharing that allows you to embark on optional side quests. Our one concern thus far is the so-so voice acting. **—CHRIS H.**





Danash VIII
Sadiv, the same cannot be said of the Blades of Night's Veil, whose results have been less than stellar.



#3 CHRIS H.'S PICK I've played more than 10 hours of Suikoden: Tierkreis so far and loved every minute of it. There are plenty of changes to the Suikoden formula, but the most important parts remain, maintaining the series' unique feel. RPG fans should monitor this one closely.

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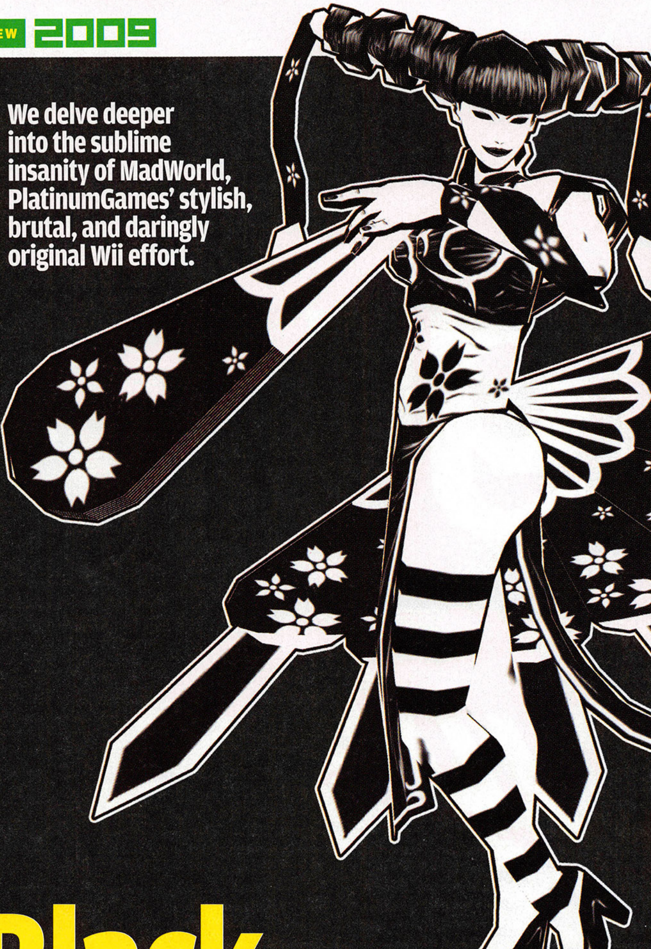
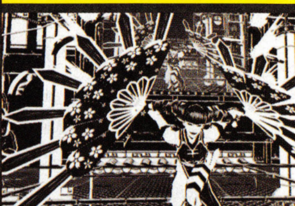
Wii
PUBLISHER:
SEGA
DEVELOPER:
PLATINUMGAMES
RELEASE:
MARCH

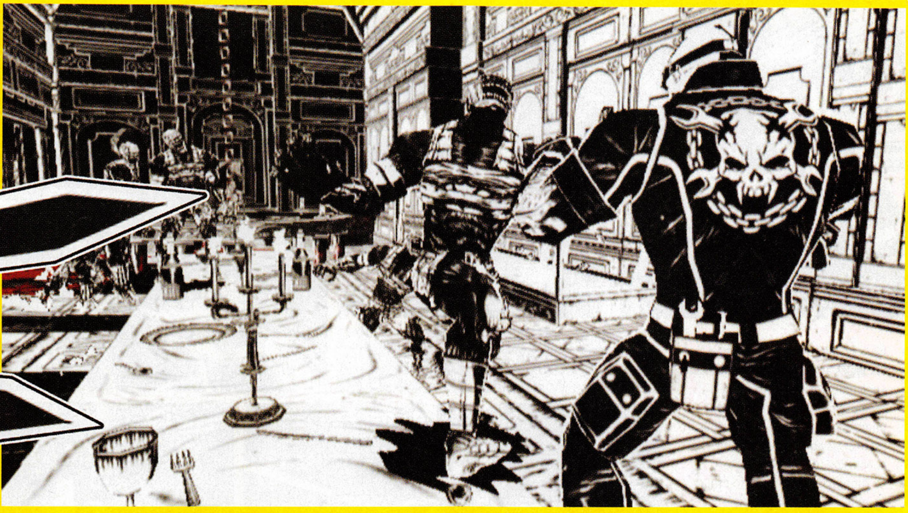
We delve deeper into the sublime insanity of MadWorld, PlatinumGames' stylish, brutal, and daringly original Wii effort.





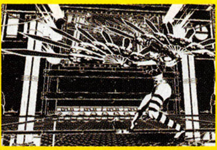
Black and White and Red all Over

BY STEVE THOMASON



MADWORLD

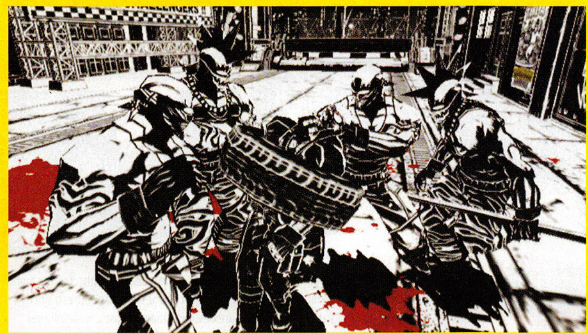
This is the fourth time MadWorld has appeared in these pages since it was first revealed six months ago, which has to be some sort of record. But when a game's development talent includes people who worked on such gems as Viewtiful Joe, Okami, and Resident Evil 4, expectations run high. Our most recent glimpse into the stylish, ultraviolent brawler took us through a brand-new level called Asia Town, and after dispatching a small legion of thugs and ne'er-do-wells, our enthusiasm for this Wii exclusive remains wholly uncurbed.



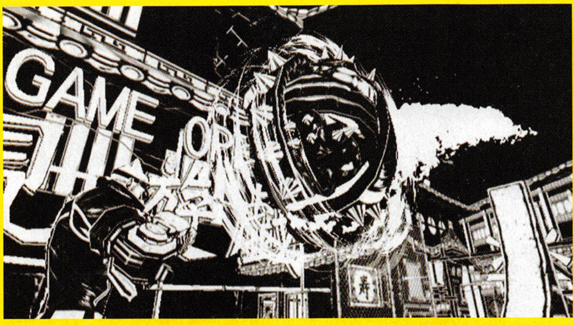
MadWorld's striking visual style is like nothing else out there, and the action doesn't simply cross the line—it sets the line on fire then throws it out the window. Yet the brutality is portrayed in such a way as to make you laugh rather than cringe (Manhunt this is not), concocting an experience that's at once visceral and lighthearted. Best of all, the sheer variety of options at your disposal when it comes to eviscerating foes continues to amaze. As we led protagonist Jack through the mean streets of Asia Town, no two enemies were treated to the same fate. One guy got a signpost through the cranium (always a favorite), another was electrocuted via neon sign, and a third had a giant, creepy doll mask slammed over his head before being tossed in front of a bus. A bus covered with spikes. We also stopped by a quaint little sushi bar where enemies could be hurled into a pair of giant Ginsu knives, and later we stumbled upon an out-of-the-way slaughterhouse complete with meat hooks and grinder.

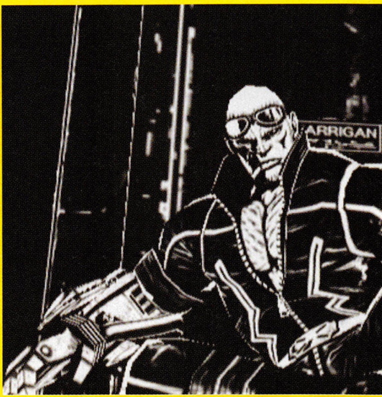
Our (painfully brief) demo concluded with a rooftop battle against a rotund miniboss. Clad in beetlelike armor, our adversary would roll into a ball and try to bowl over Jack before stopping to take a breather. That was our cue to grab a nearby crate of food and throw it at the portly assailant, distracting him with the tasty morsels and leaving him open to attack. Once we had dished out enough damage, we were able to send the miniboss airborne with a mighty uppercut. Then with a properly timed flick of the Wii remote on

▶



大酒
お座敷
VIP ROOM



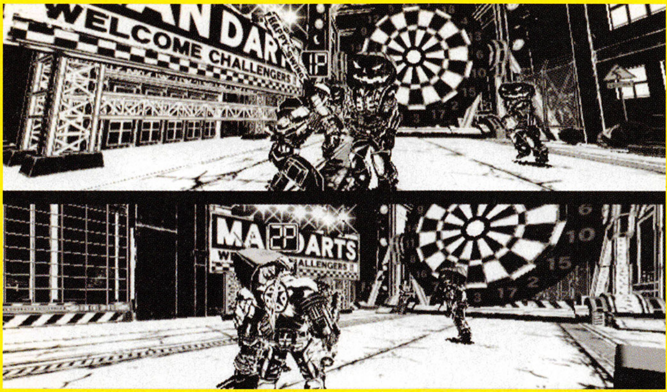


[Above] One of MadWorld's minibosses is about to turn our hero into a flapJack. [Below] He may be a thug, but he's got an electric personality. (We're so sorry.)

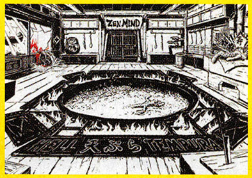
his way down, we cut him in half via Jack's arm-mounted chainsaw. Such unique finishing maneuvers are possible with every boss and miniboss in the game, and pulling them off is an oh-so-satisfying conclusion to those encounters.

Though it's not be the first thing to jump out at you amidst the carnage, MadWorld's audio fits the game like a glove. A rough-edged hip-hop soundtrack gets you pumped to wreak some grisly havoc, and each stage infuses that soundtrack with the appropriate flavor. The music in Asia Town, for example, mixes in distinct Asian influences. Since the game is set against the backdrop of a futuristic game show (more on that in a bit), the action also features color commentary, with voice work provided by John DiMaggio (the voice of Bender from *Futurama*) and Greg Proops (stand-up comedian and frequent guest on *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*). What we've heard so far is pretty darn funny—the material goes blue early and often, and the commentators deliver it with zeal.

We also got a sneak peak at MadWorld's cut-scenes, which suggest that the game's televised festivities aren't part of the regularly scheduled programming. It seems a mysterious group has blocked all access to Jefferson Island, essentially holding its inhabitants hostage, and offered $100 million to anyone who survives the makeshift game show. Jack appears to be some sort of bounty hunter, though his purpose for being on the island is unclear. We do know that our hero sounds appropriately badass (with a voice more than a little reminiscent



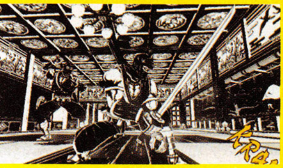
Two players engage in a friendly game of Man Darts. During multiplayer, you have the option to split the screen either horizontally or vertically.



[Above] Who wants bad guy tempura?

#1

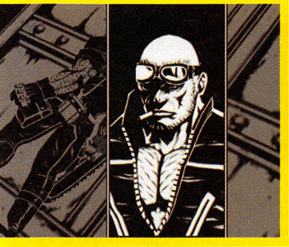
STEVE T.'S PICK I've been effusing over MadWorld for months, but the more I see of the game, the more it impresses me. It just bristles with raw, unrestrained creativity—the folks at PlatinumGames are obviously mad geniuses. Hopefully our continued coverage has you pumped for the game as well.



of Solid Snake's). Our favorite exchange takes place when someone tells him, "We just want you to enjoy the game. No, call it a 'sport.'" Jack's response: "Of course. Like polo. With chainsaws."

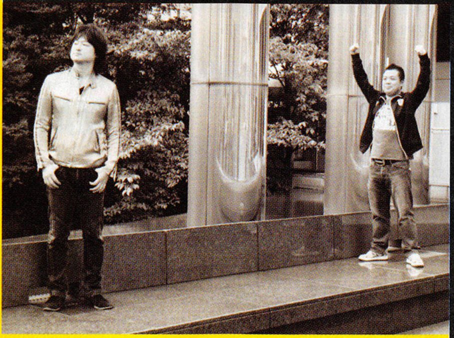
A final bit of good news is that contrary to previous reports, MadWorld will offer a split-screen two-player mode. You and a buddy can compete in a variety of death-dealing challenges as Jack and his evil nemesis Kojack, trying to rack up the most points within a time limit. And throwing bad guys into an oversized hydraulic press really is a joy best shared with friends.

—STEVE T.



Mad Men

Eager to learn any little nugget we can about their game, we caught up with MadWorld producer Atsushi Inaba and director Shigenori Nishikawa.



NINTENDO POWER How's development coming along? Have there been any unforeseen challenges?

ATSUSHI INABA We're at the height of our development right now, so it's a very busy time. Mr. Nishikawa may look very happy right now, and he's smiling in front of us, but once he gets into the studio with his team, he's always very tense. [Laughs]

Can you talk a little bit about the motorcycle sections? Are those fully controllable? How frequently do they occur in the game?

SHIGENORI NISHIKAWA Actually, Jack will be able to fight enemies using his chainsaw while he's on his bike. That's how you'll play through those areas. You won't see a whole level dedicated to Jack being on a bike, but that part is used to accentuate parts of the game. So you'll see it in various areas of the game, but not necessarily in every stage.

When we last spoke, you were thinking about including kiosks from which the player would purchase new weapons using points. Is that something that's going to make it into the game?

SN The basic system of gaining enough points to acquire a new weapon is the same. But instead of going to specific kiosks to purchase weapons, you'll simply unlock weapons from a menu. When you acquire a certain number of points, you can unlock a weapon or unlock a new minigame or unlock a new boss battle. It's still based on points, but you won't have to go to a kiosk and choose what you want to purchase.

How's it been working with Sega on this project? Has it been a very collaborative process, where Sega's given a lot of feedback, or have they just stepped back and let you do your thing?

AI Obviously, when you're trying to make a really good game, it's not always the best idea to let the majority vote win the discussion. As a studio, PlatinumGames has proposed the content, we've come up with the ideas, etc. But we really want to appeal to the West with MadWorld, and as a Japanese developer, we don't know enough about Western tastes to make certain decisions. We've received some very good feedback from Sega of America and Sega of Europe in terms of what will do well in the West and what the preferences are of the Western market. So yeah, it's been a very good collaborative effort.

What is your favorite finishing move or weapon in the game?

SN My favorite weapon is the chainsaw. But I also love the finishing moves for the dual daggers—cutting people in half, decapitation, etc.

AI I also really love the daggers, but Nishikawa took that answer. [Laughs] My other favorite would be this area where you find a bat and there's a rose bush against one of the walls. There are a lot of enemies there, and you can just start sending the enemies flying toward the rose bush.

During the demo, we came across onions that you could pick up. What's the deal with those?

SN Right now, we're planning for it to replenish Jack's health. It's called Happy Onion in the game, and it's Jack favorite food.

AI It's sort of like Popeye and his spinach. We're trying to get kids to eat onions. But kids shouldn't be playing this game, so nevermind! [Laughs]

This is Mr. Nishikawa's first time directing. How have you found the experience thus far?

SN It's really tough, but I'm learning so much from the experience. Especially with this game because it's geared more toward the Western audience. It's not all about me finding the content really funny or enjoyable. It's not about the team finding it funny. We have to think about the different cultures and how the different territories will feel about specific content. So it's been very challenging.

#2

CHRIS H.'S PICK As a fan of old-school beat-'em-ups, I can say that PlatinumGames has implemented some extraordinarily satisfying brawling in MadWorld—perhaps the best since gaming went 3-D. The grabs and throws are particularly rewarding (and brutal), and there's a ton of variety in your attacks, too.

#2

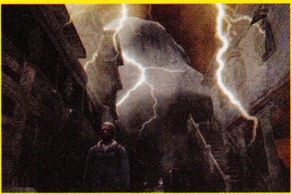
JUSTIN C.'S PICK While I haven't spent as much time with the game as the other guys, I'm enthralled by MadWorld's over-the-top action and overall style. I'm a fan of games that try something different, and MadWorld certainly fits the bill.

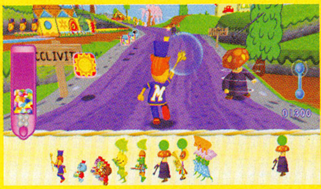
CURSED MOUNTAIN

A Wii-exclusive survival-horror title, Cursed Mountain has your hero traversing the inhospitable peaks of the Tibetan Himalayas in search of his missing brother. Along the way, he'll have to contend with not only the harsh elements, but a host of ill-tempered apparitions. The game makes clever use of the Wii remote—simulating a walkie-talkie, for example, as a guide speaks to you through the controller's speaker—and its isolated setting feels suitably creepy. —**STEVE T.**

Wii

PUBLISHER: **DEEP SILVER**
DEVELOPER: **DEEP SILVER**
RELEASE: **TBD**





MAJOR MINOR'S MAJESTIC MARCH

Created by the makers of PaRappa the Rapper, Major Minor's Majestic March was supposed to be out in late 2008 but was delayed until early 2009, and now we're hearing it might be delayed yet again. When we last saw the game, the swing-the-remote-to-set-the-tempo gameplay was pretty fun, but we admire the developers taking their time to make sure everything turns out just right. We're digging the quirky settings and offbeat character designs, too. —**CHRIS H.**

Wii

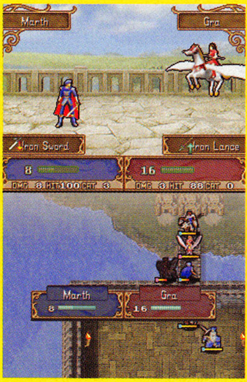
PUBLISHER:
MAJESCO
DEVELOPER:
NANAON-SHA
RELEASE: **Q1**

FIRE EMBLEM: SHADOW DRAGON

DS

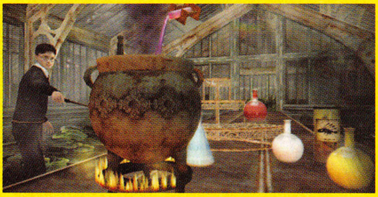
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER:
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
RELEASE: **1ST HALF**

Turn-based strategists have clashed in two DS Advance Wars titles so far, but in 2009, the war hawks at Intelligent Systems will turn their attention to the first Fire Emblem game for the handheld, and the only title in the series that allows players to go head-to-head. Shadow Dragon is a reboot of the initial Fire Emblem game (released in Japan for the Famicom) with updated graphics and local or online multiplayer functionality. The story has Prince Marth (also a star of the Smash Bros. titles) forming a team of Pegasus Knights, cavaliers on horseback, and other combatants to take on Gharnef the sorcerer and Medeus, the king of the dragonkin. A new tutorial offers additional episodes and a chance to try out the game's optional stylus-driven control. —**GEORGE S.**



Fort Menedy

Status
Prologue IV
Turns 2
Forest



HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE

Harry's sixth wizarding adventure is basically an improved version of the previous game in the series, Order of the Phoenix, with better motion controls and expanded interior and exterior locations at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Also, a greater emphasis has been placed on telling the story through more and better cinematics. *HBP* is one of the best Potter books, with a lot of major plot twists that set up our favorite wizards and witches for the series' seventh and final chapter, so we're hopeful that it will translate into one of the franchise's most enjoyable games. —**CHRIS SL.**

PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CASUAL STUDIOS**
RELEASE: **JULY**

Wii
DS

Castlevania
Order of Ecclesia

Castlevania
Order of Ecclesia
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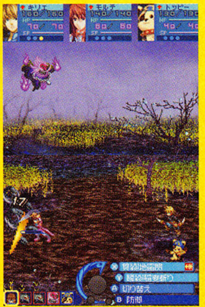
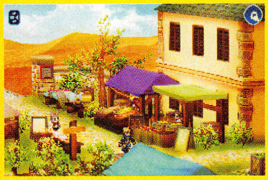
DS

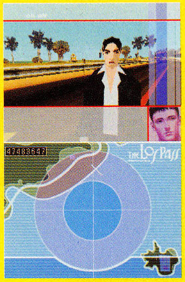
PUBLISHER:
SEGA
DEVELOPER:
IMAGEEPOCH
RELEASE:
SUMMER

SANDS OF DESTRUCTION

Sega's Sands of Destruction takes the typical RPG premise—boy meets girl then sets out to save the world—and flips it on its head. Here, boy meets girl then sets out to *destroy* the world. (In Japan, the game even goes by the title World Destruction.) What makes this unique narrative even more intriguing is that it comes from Chrono-series writer Masato Kato. The game's production values are also mighty impressive, including an orchestral theme song composed by Yasunori Mitsuda and performed by the Czech Philharmonic. **—STEVE T.**







FLOWER, SUN, AND RAIN

Suda51 (No More Heroes, Killer7) is one of our favorite gamesmiths, so we're excited to play this updated DS version of his released-only-in-Japan PS2 game Flower, Sun, and Rain. You are Sumio Mondo, a "searcher" who relives the same day over and over again as he attempts to prevent a bomb blast by solving DS-exclusive touch-controlled puzzles. **—JUSTIN C.**

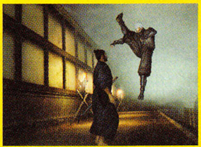
PUBLISHER: **XSEED/MARVELOUS USA**
DEVELOPER: **GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE**
RELEASE: **MARCH**

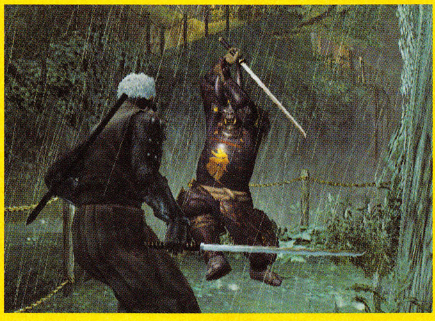
DS

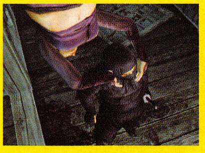
TENCHU 4: SHADOW ASSASSINS

It's immensely satisfying to catch a guard unawares, then either use his own sword against him or snap his neck Steven Seagal-style before he can alert his buddies in the Wii-exclusive Tenchu 4. Performing one of these all-important "Hissatsu" stealth kills is as simple as creeping up to an enemy while you're hidden (as indicated by the black aura enshrouding you), pressing A when prompted, then shaking your remote or nunchuk to perform a lethal maneuver.

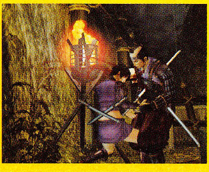
An enemy could spot you if you don't tread carefully, however, and being spotted has an often-deadly (for you) consequence. Thankfully, if you have a sword in your arsenal you stand a fighting chance by facing off in a one-on-one duel.

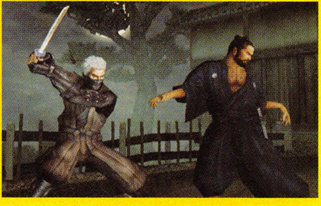






The game's perspective shifts from third- to first-person, and you swing the remote like a sword, blocking your enemy's attacks by tilting your sword perpendicular to their strikes. Too many poor blocks, and your sword will break (never a good thing), but if you manage to defend properly, you'll have the opportunity to get in some offense of your own. Despite that, these battles are punishingly difficult, so it behooves you to be a good ninja and avoid a face-to-face confrontation altogether.





Motion controls come into play with the other items in your arsenal, as well. After you've lined up your target by aiming with the Control Stick, for example, simply flick the remote forward to chuck a deadly throwing star at your target, be it a candle (to create more cover) or a person (to... get them out of the way). In this mostly linear adventure—you just aim for the blue flames or hold Z to see where to go next—you have a decent amount of freedom while traveling from point A to point B. **—JUSTIN C.**

Wii

PUBLISHER:
UBISOFT
DEVELOPER:
ACQUIRE
RELEASE:
JANUARY

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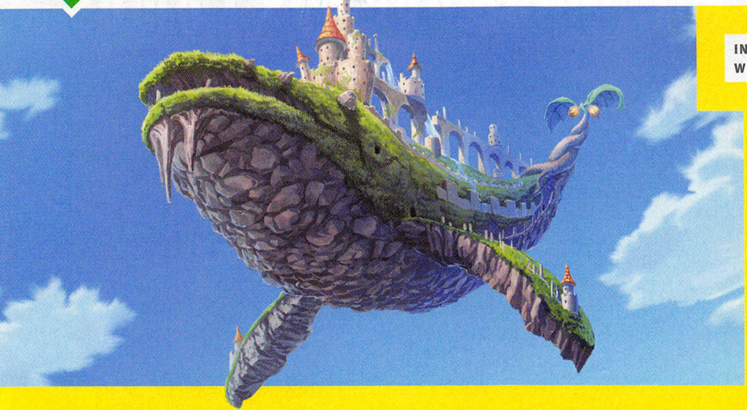


RUNE FACTORY FRONTIER

Wii

PUBLISHER: **XSEED/MARVELOUS USA**
DEVELOPER: **NEVERLAND**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY**

The latest version of Rune Factory has a new platform, a new US publisher, and a host of new features, but the crux of the series remains. Having originally sprouted as a Harvest Moon spin-off, it combines that franchise's low-key brand of farming with RPG-inspired dungeon exploration. The formula has proved oddly compelling through two DS installments (see page 90 for our review of the newly released Rune Factory 2), and Frontier seems poised to deliver a banner crop.

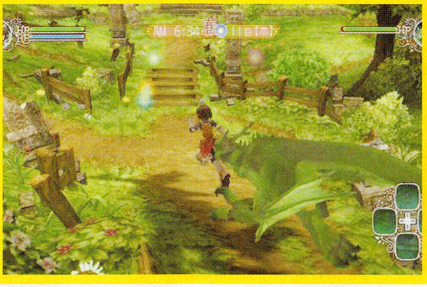
For starters, the game looks terrific. Everything is rendered with impressive detail, and the graphics have a certain warmth that makes you feel right at home. The presentation is further bolstered by fully animated cut-scenes that highlight key moments, and a soothing, melodic soundtrack ensures that the game is equally easy on the ears.

The basics tenets of farming remain largely the same. You plant, care for, and harvest a variety of crops as seasons pass in real time (at a greatly accelerated pace, of course), and the fruits of your labor can be sold or kept as healing items for your more hazardous ventures. New to Frontier's fields are motion controls for most of the activities (though you can use traditional button presses if you prefer) and adorable little sprites called Runneys that alter your farm's ecosystem. Blue Runneys increase the amount of rainfall on a given plot, for instance, while yellow Runneys provide extra sunlight.

Should you decide to trade your produce for cash, you can patronize the shops in the surrounding village to obtain new tools, weapons, and other assorted goods. Certain items may also be purchased as gifts in an attempt to woo the ladies. Once you've sufficiently bribed an eligible bachelorette (and/or won her over with your conversational skills), you can ask for her hand in marriage, and eventually have a child. Unlike in Rune Factory 2, your next of kin is not playable, but he or she will grow from a baby to a toddler, then to a rambunctious tyke who follows you around town and to whom you can dispense fatherly advice.

When you need a break from the domestic life, Frontier offers copious dungeons to explore and monsters to slay. Or capture. By attempting to pet certain beasts rather than attack them, you may find yourself a furry new friend. Each monster has its own unique abilities—some are best suited to battle, whereas others prove more useful back on the farm. Certain pets can even be ridden.

To dig up more information on this new Frontier, we spoke with producer and scenario writer Yoshifumi Hashimoto. —**STEVE T.**



INTERVIEW WITH PRODUCER/SCENARIO WRITER YOSHIFUMI HASHIMOTO

NINTENDO POWER What's the meaning behind the word "Frontier" in the title?

YOSHIFUMI HASHIMOTO Since the previous Rune Factory [games] were on the DS, I decided to go with "Frontier" as this is new territory for the franchise on the Wii. We really wanted to deliver something that couldn't be done on a handheld device and that's also one of the meanings behind it.

Can you talk a little bit about how the story ties into the first two games?

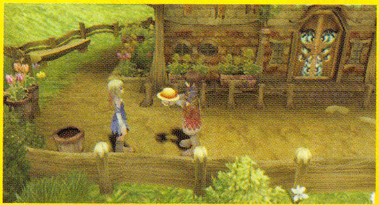
Frontier is a story that takes place somewhere in the middle of the first Rune Factory. The reasoning behind this is that players from the first Rune Factory may have been single or become married toward the end of the game and we didn't want to be limited to just those options. This way, we could revisit a lot of the characters introduced in the first game while creating a different progression where the story and ending—even with the same characters—is completely different depending on the player's actions.

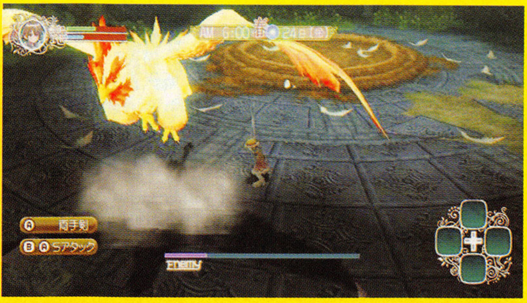
With that in mind, in Frontier you're not in a relationship with a special someone yet but you are friends with everyone and moved to a new location, so everything from there is a fresh new start.

Does the development team for Frontier consist mostly of the same folks who worked on the first two games? And what other titles have they worked on previously?

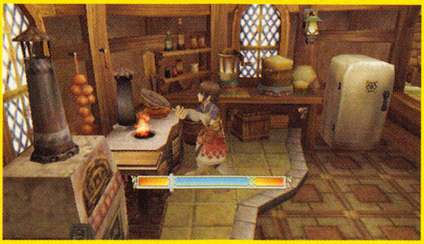
The main staff overseeing the title is the same as for the first and second Rune Factory [games], but the actual development team is different.

[Left] Dogs and cats are nice, but nothing beats a pet dragon.





[Below] We can only assume he's frying up some phoenix patties. Delicious!



The Rune Factory series consists of many seemingly disparate elements: farming, dungeon exploration, dating simulation, etc. Where did the idea come from to combine these different aspects?
Usually fantasy games concentrate on the fighting elements, but I thought even fantasy people live their everyday lives by farming their own food or getting into a scary situation such as being chased by monsters. I wanted to make a fantasy game that focuses on the lifestyle of the characters.

How has the relationship system changed from previous games?
Since this title is on a home console the volume has increased enormously. Players should notice a big difference in the sheer number of events once they start playing the game. Also, since this is a Wii title, we have some gameplay elements that take advantage of the unique features of the Wii Remote, such as rowing the boat while you're on a date or hitting a watermelon (a famous beach activity in Japan, similar to breaking a piñata).

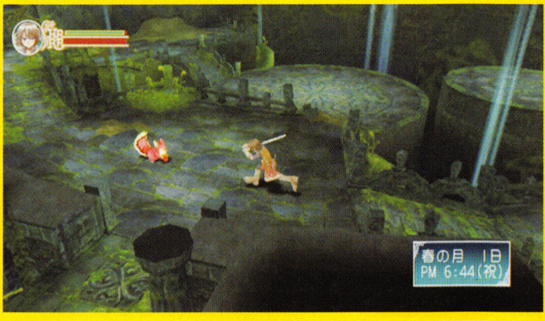
It seems like Frontier is a bit more story-driven than previous installments. Would you say that's accurate, and if so, why did the team decide to move in that direction?
Again, since this time it's on a home console, we really wanted to expand on the story and replay elements.

It's been reported previously that the better you take care of your land in Rune Factory Frontier, the busier the surrounding village becomes, with more people moving in, more shops opening, etc. Is this true, and if so, can you describe a little how that works?
That is true, and the easiest way to explain it is that how you take care of your land changes how the village grows. For example, if you break some rocks in a dungeon and hit a hot spring, a girl who likes hot springs will move into your village. This is a good example of how the player's actions can affect other characters or even have new ones show up and move into the village.

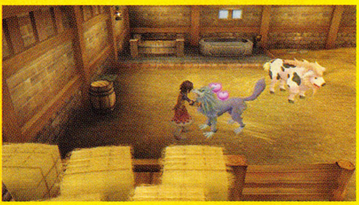
Have you received any feedback from fans of the series that you've been able to implement in Frontier?
There are quite a few. Some of the feedback varied from wanting streamlined gameplay to other aspects of the game where people would say, "I wish it was more like this." Some of this feedback was from Japan, but of course we implemented US user feedback too. For example, there are a lot more battle elements and enhanced animations. Also, as a little bonus we included swimsuits for each character.

Compared to the DS versions of Rune Factory, what would you say are the most exciting new additions to Rune Factory Frontier?
That will be the floating "Whale Island." The adventure that takes place in the skies is definitely one of the big new features, as is having a natural ecosystem and food chain in the fantasy world dependent upon the new "Runney" spirits.

Finally, if you had your own farm in real life, which crops would you plant and why?
If it's a real-life crop I would like to try to grow a watermelon again. When I was little, we had a garden at the back of our house and we grew a lot of different crops there. We were able to grow eggplants and Japanese radishes, but watermelons were really difficult to grow. Every time, before it got big, it would stop growing or get eaten by bugs right before it became ripe. I would love to grow a big watermelon one day....



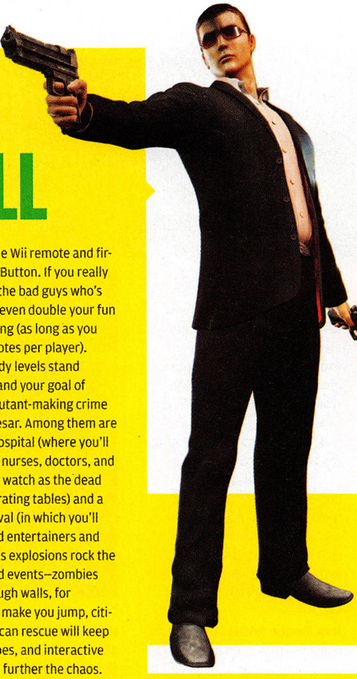
[Below] Taking good care of your animals makes them more effective.



Wii

PUBLISHER:
SEGA
DEVELOPER:
HEADSTRONG GAMES
RELEASE:
FEBRUARY

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL



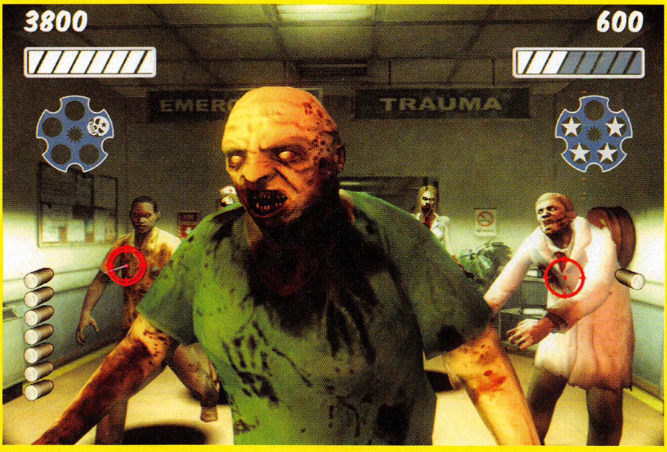
If you're under 17 and you're reading this, you might want to flip to another page. Just do it right now. Because The House of the Dead: Overkill is not for you. Wii owners who are of the appropriate age, however, should get ready for one of the most stylish, over-the-top light-gun-style shooters they've ever seen.

Staying true to the series' arcade origins, The House of the Dead: Overkill is all about scary thrills and the simple yet exhilarating action of blasting hordes of zombies, mutants, and assorted undead freaks, either alone or with a friend. But what sets Overkill apart from its predecessors is its attitude and grindhouse style: movie-trailer-like level intros; saturated colors; funky surf music; filmlike graphic filters; B-horror-flick set pieces; and intentionally hilarious, vulgarity-laced dialogue that attempts to elevate profanity to an art form. Even the power-ups are oozing with personality—a bullet-time-style pickup goes by the name of Slow Mo-Fo.

Thrown into this gory gratuitousness are series protagonist Agent G and his partner, an anything-but-by-the-book cop named Detective Isaac Washington. The banter between them is top-notch, and the action is relentless. Magnums, semiautomatic shotguns, assault rifles, and grenades are all at your disposal, and turning a zombie into meaty chunks is as simple as aiming with the Wii remote and firing with the B Button. If you really want to show the bad guys who's boss, you can even double your fun by dual-wielding (as long as you have two remotes per player).

Seven bloody levels stand between you and your goal of eliminating mutant-making crime boss Papa Caesar. Among them are a horrifying hospital (where you'll battle zombie nurses, doctors, and orderlies, and watch as the dead rise from operating tables) and a burning carnival (in which you'll face zombified entertainers and flaming foes as explosions rock the area). Scripted events—zombies crashing through walls, for example—will make you jump, citizens that you can rescue will keep you on your toes, and interactive environments further the chaos. Naturally, a gruesome boss lies in wait at the end of each stage.

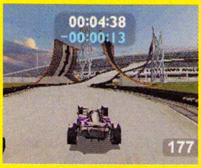
And that's just the beginning; Overkill also features an unlockable Director's Cut mode (which contains expanded commentary, extra cut-scenes, and an additional branching path), bonus minigames, and plentiful options, such as the ability to double or even triple the number of foes onscreen. Sega and developer Headstrong Games have obviously put a lot of effort into making this one, and we'll get to see if it pays off when the game hits in February. **—CHRIS H.**



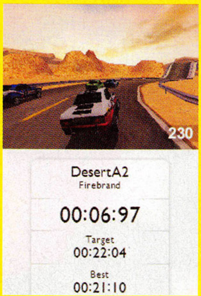
DS

PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **FIREBRAND GAMES**
RELEASE: **MARCH**

TRACKMANIA DS



At first glance you might pass off TrackMania as another racing game for the DS given the presence of cars, tracks, speed gauges, and the like. But really there isn't a whole lot of racing goin' on; TrackMania is more of a puzzle-platformer on wheels than anything else. The goal of the game is to survive short, perilous courses riddled with car-swallowing pot-holes, harrowing jumps, and other hazards—and to do so as swiftly as possible. To add to the difficulty, you'll have to get accustomed to three different vehicles—an Indy car, a muscle car, and a rally car—all of which have unique handling. Depending on the mode, you'll earn rewards based on how fast you completed the course or how many times you had to restart. The highlight of the game, however, is a full-featured track creator that will keep you busy long after you've ripped up the supplied courses. You can shop for new track pieces with points you earn during races, and when you've created a devilish masterpiece of a track, you can share it with your friends via local multiplayer. **—CHRIS SH.**



DesertA2
Firebrand
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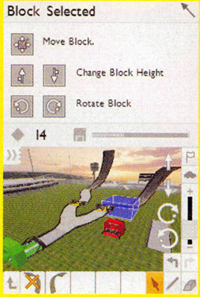
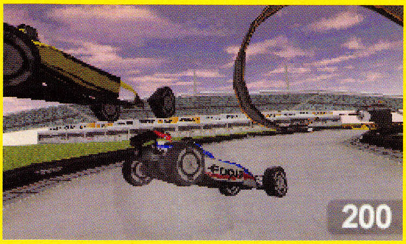
Target
00:22:04
Best
00:21:10





[Left] The track editor lets you create alternate paths where drivers can choose their own fate.

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Wii PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **KLONOA WORKS**
RELEASE: **Q2**

What Dreams Are Made Of

Namco Bandai's fantastical, magical Klonoa makes his North American return, thoroughly enhanced and exclusively on Wii. It's a dream come true for platforming fans.

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

KLONOA

The original Klonoa: Door to Phantomile, released in 1998, was arguably the best platformer released for the PlayStation. Extremely polished game design and a unique sense of whimsy helped the game succeed on so many levels; the majestic, dream-inspired worlds were unlike anything players had experienced, while 3-D visuals and 2-D-style gameplay (commonly known as 2.5-D) combined the best of classic game-design sensibilities with modern technology. Perhaps most important was the compelling, almost addictive, core play mechanic—the ability to reach out and grab enemies using a Wind Bullet, then toss them as weapons at other foes, ride them into the sky, or boost off of them in midair to give Klonoa (the game's catlike protagonist) a unique twist on the traditional double jump.

Those who discovered the game couldn't get enough—it was praised highly by critics—and although it didn't generate huge sales in North America, it was successful enough to earn a PS2 sequel and two puzzle-oriented Game Boy Advance spin-offs, as well as a couple of releases that never made it to the US. Now, after a four-year hiatus, the long-eared hero is returning exclusively to Wii this coming spring in a fully modernized remake of his original adventure, simply titled Klonoa.

"I feel that Klonoa is a game with a very strong fan base, and we've received a lot of requests from those fans saying that they'd like to see a new title in the series," says director Hideo Yoshizawa, who also directed the original Klonoa (as well as Ninja Gaiden on the NES). "As soon as Bandai and Namco merged together, our vice president, Mr. [Shin] Unozawa, mentioned that he was a fan of the Klonoa series and that he would like for us to revive the franchise. And when thinking about where to start...we realized that it had been 10 years since the series had debuted, and we felt that the best approach would probably just be to start from the beginning—to start fresh and completely remake the game."

While longtime Klonoa fans will embrace the world of Phantomile like an old friend—it comes complete with the levels, enemies, and technique-filled gameplay that made the PS1 version so beloved, now with the benefits of vastly improved graphics that demonstrate how far 3-D artistry has come in the last decade—Wii was selected as the platform for Klonoa's return specifically for the diversity of its users.

"When Klonoa was originally created, it was designed as a game that could appeal to a wide range of fans, both younger players and adults," Yoshizawa states. "Even when writing the plot for the game, we felt that it was the type of story that could appeal to a wide range of people because children could enjoy the adventure-like aspects of it while older players could appreciate some of the emotional plot twists. And considering how the Wii as a home console has such a wide appeal, we thought that it was best suited to this title."

The Surreal Life

One of the many reasons for Klonoa's appeal is its ephemeral setting in the land of Phantomile, a world that is shaped by the energy of people's dreams, and a place in which almost anything is possible.

"When originally thinking of Klonoa," comments Yoshizawa, "I was struck by the idea that when you wake up sometimes in the morning and you know you had a dream but you can't remember what it was, obviously the dream went somewhere, at least in my way of thinking. I thought, 'I wonder where these dreams go. What if all these dreams that are lost when people wake up but they can't remember are carried away and collected somewhere like some sort of energy?' And that's sort of... where the concept came from."

With dreams as the basis for Klonoa's world, players are faced with incredibly imaginative environments full of branching paths and multiple routes. The story begins in the Wind Village Breezegale, a lively place full of windmills, where Klonoa witnesses a strange ship fall from the sky. From there, the floppy-eared hero, along with his round, blue companion Hewpoe, journeys to underground caverns (which come complete with mine-cart rides), lush forests, mechanical mansions, vast waterfalls that defy gravity by flowing upward, and more.

Along the way, you'll collect gems (100 earn you an extra life), overcome obstacles (some of which can be conquered by Klonoa's ability to throw objects into the foreground and background), and face bizarre bosses, such as the clownlike Joker and the freaky, cloaked, pointy-mask-wearing Ghadius.

"When designing the game—when looking at the characters that appear and the stages and

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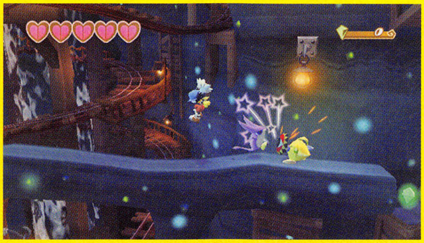
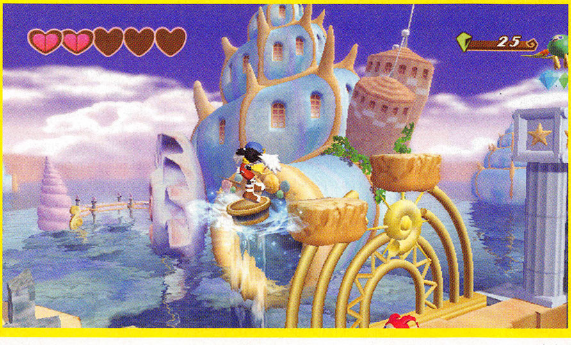
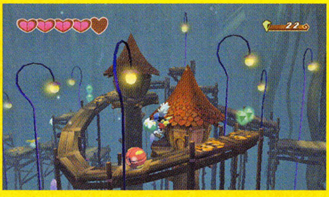
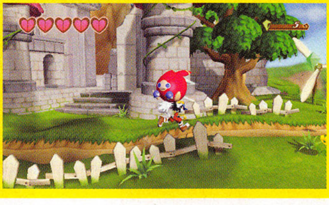


[Below] Where other than in Klonoa can you find buildings made from giant seashells? Only in your dreams.







everything—[I tried] to implement things that I felt could appear in anyone's dreams," Yoshizawa elaborates. "Some of the stages appear like more-pleasant dreams, whereas others are more like nightmares. We tried to imagine a dream world people could relate to from their own dreams and experiences."

Sharpened Vision

Even though Klonoa is essentially a reimagining of a classic game, it's far from a quick and simple port. Key members of the original development team (including chief planner Tsuyoshi Kobayashi, visual chief Yoshihiko Arai, and sound designer Kanako Kakino) are contributing to ensure that the Wii version surpasses the lofty standards set by the PS1 version, and numerous embellishments and additions are being introduced to the game. Players can choose to give Klonoa a longer life bar, for example, and some stages have been "flattened out" so they're more natural to navigate.

"One of the differences that people who are familiar with the previous game will notice right away is that the gameplay has been tweaked a bit so it is much more intuitive and easier to control," says Yoshizawa. "A lot of these changes are small elements but they really help to refine the gameplay. Things such as increasing the speed at which Klonoa runs, the length of his shot, and adjusting the hit range of the enemies. We also tweaked his floating jump so that he kind of goes up a little bit at the end."

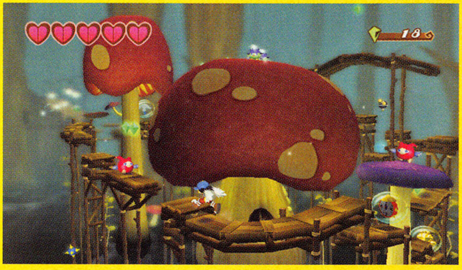
Other enhancements aren't so subtle; one of the biggest is the inclusion of gesture-based Wii controls—a feature exclusive to the game's North American release. While there are numerous control options (you can use the Classic or GameCube controllers, or you can play by holding the Wii remote sideways), players who opt for the remote-and-nunchuk configuration can snare enemies by pressing the B Button, then throw them with a flick of the remote.

Furthermore, the game features plentiful unlockables, including extra costumes for Klonoa (you can obtain outfits worn in previous Klonoa games, among other ensembles), a character-model viewer, a music player, and mirrored versions of the game's 12 main stages (or Visions, as they're known).

Yoshizawa explains, "To expand a little bit more on that mirror mode, it adds a little bit of extra gameplay because it has a different feel if you're going through it from the opposite direction. In each of the mirror stages there's a hidden entrance somewhere that [contains] another bonus area inside, sort of like a mini time-attack challenge. And there's one in each of the stages, so there's a total of 12 altogether. They're pretty much designed for the hardcore fans."

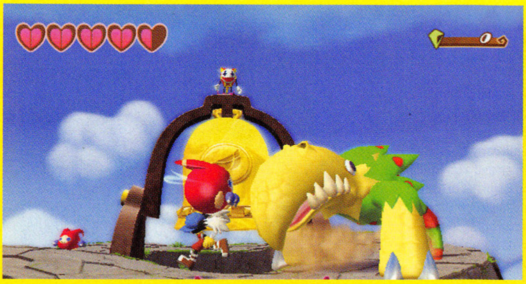
Speaking of tough challenges, the game also contains a volcanic-themed bonus stage that you can reach if you rescue the six Phantomilian inhabitants in each level. Despite the many adjust-

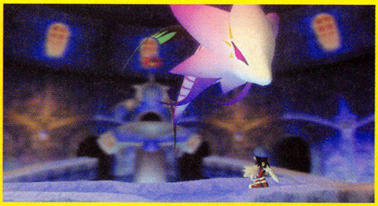
[Below] Klonoa has come to save the Mushroom Kingdom! OK, maybe not, but his platforming skills will give a certain plumber a run for his money.



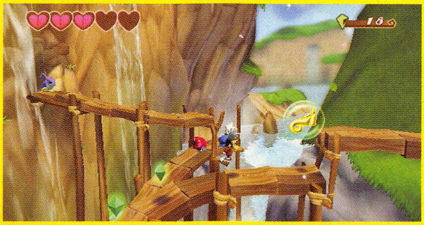
All's Well that Ends Well

One of the most revered elements of the original Klonoa was its deep and surprising ending, and that aspect won't be changing for the game's Wii release. We asked director Hideo Yoshizawa about the inspiration for the game's conclusion. "When players play a game, they involve themselves in this world for a certain amount of time and they familiarize themselves with the characters in the game and they seem so real," he reflects. "But then when the game's done and you turn it off, it disappears and it's almost like it never happened, even though at the time it felt so real. And that was sort of an inspiration, in a way, for the story.... We're not really expecting the players—especially some of the younger players—to think too deeply about the story, especially considering the fact that they don't really know where the story is going from the beginning. [We] really feel that they'll be able to experience the adventure right along with Klonoa, and something we really want the players to enjoy is finding out how the plot twists and turns along with Klonoa."





The boss battles in Klonoa are pretty nifty. They typically involve tracking down an enemy or object that you can use as a weapon, then hurling it at the boss's weak spot.



ments being made to the game as whole to make it more accessible, this extra stage should give even platforming vets a run for their money.

"In the Extra Vision, basically [you must use] some of the more difficult moves in the game [that] involve jumping, doing a double jump with an enemy, then catching another enemy in the air, and then launching yourself in midair to go higher and higher," describes Yoshizawa. "It's going to require the player to use a lot of those more finely tuned skills and really push the player to his or her limits to complete the stage.... For the really hardcore players there's also a timed version of that stage, so that should be pretty difficult."

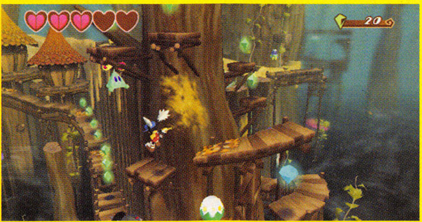
One thing you won't find in the game is a radically revamped Klonoa character design. Although the crew at Namco Bandai was considering giving the hero a new look for North America (which would have featured pointy ears and no hat), overwhelming support for the classic Klonoa through an online survey caused the company to stick with his traditional appearance.

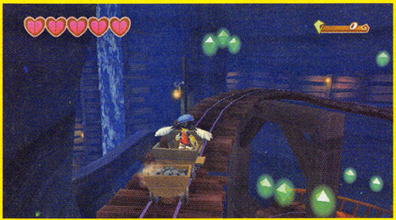
Perchance to Dream

Our hands-on experience with Klonoa has been nothing short of exceptional. The game looks gorgeous, sounds great, and controls amazingly well, while the level designs and techniques involved in exploring them hold up flawlessly. With any luck, Klonoa's arrival on Wii will reward his creators and fans with the broad recognition he's so long deserved—which would pave the way for more Klonoa adventures in the future.

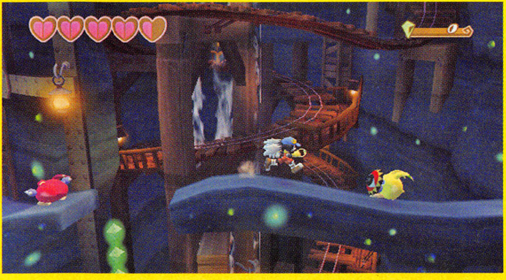
"One thing we'd like to do is—if this game is well received—think about releasing Klonoa 2 [on Wii] followed up by a sequel after that so that players could see the progression of Klonoa through the entire series," reveals Yoshizawa. "We feel very proud of Klonoa. We feel that the gameplay is both unique and solid. And we'd like as many players to experience that as possible. We think it's got a unique story and we hope that a new generation of players will play through to the end and enjoy it just as much as the fans did 10 years ago."

So far the developers are on the right path; the game has all the ingredients necessary to be one of the best platformers (or games in any genre) of 2009.





Why run when you can ride? Klonoa gives his legs (and ears) a rest by hitching a ride on a cart in the Gunston Mine.



#1

CHRIS H.'S PICK I'd almost forgotten how much fun the original Klonoa was. The gameplay mechanics are simple but brilliant, and the level design is superb—you can rush on through or you can spend hours exploring every route to discover the world's secrets.

#2

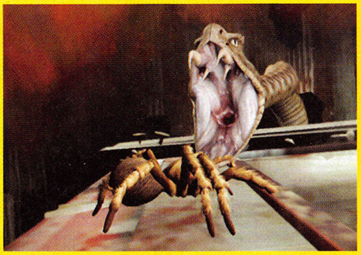
STEVE T.'S PICK Klonoa remains one of my all-time favorite platformers, so I'm elated to see it get another chance on Wii. Now it's up to you compassionate, wise, and strikingly attractive readers to give our floppy-eared friend the success he deserves. And you'd better, because I want a Klonoa 3!

DEADLY CREATURES

Deadly Creatures, with its unusual arachnid protagonists, was on track to be one of the most unique Wii adventure games of 2008. But then a funny thing happened: THQ delayed the game until early 2009. You'll still get to control both a scorpion and a tarantula (each with distinct abilities), and you'll still get to hear Dennis Hopper and Billy Bob Thornton as the game's human antagonists; you'll just have to do it a bit later than anticipated. **—CHRIS H.**

PUBLISHER:
THQ
DEVELOPER:
RAINBOW STUDIOS
RELEASE:
FEBRUARY

Wii

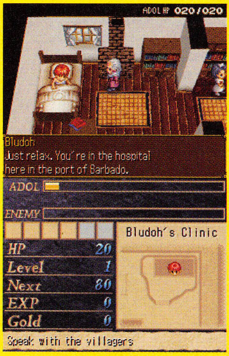


DS

PUBLISHER:
ATLUS
DEVELOPER:
FALCOM
RELEASE:
FEBRUARY

LEGACY OF YS: BOOKS I & II

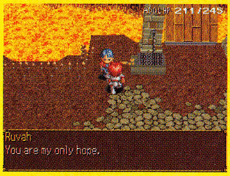
Even though Legacy of Ys: Books I & II is an updated remake of the classic Ys action-RPGs, it hasn't lost much of its old-school nature. Sure, there's a significant number of improvements—including a bigger game world, an onscreen map, touch-based and traditional control options, four difficulty settings, gorgeous anime sequences, a task indicator so you won't forget what to do next, and a vastly enhanced localization—but you'll know you're playing a game with classic roots when you hear the rockin' '80s soundtrack and encounter an enemy who you can barely scratch because you're under-leveled. And that's not a bad thing—Ys is one of the most influential games in its genre, and getting to experience its straightforward, vintage gameplay with modern trappings is a blast, especially since you now have the option of pressing a button to swing your sword instead of just ramming enemies like in the TurboGrafx CD version (available on Virtual Console). And with two full games on one card (Ys I and Ys II were sold separately in Japan), there's plenty of content for fans to enjoy. **—CHRIS H.**



ADOL HP 020/020

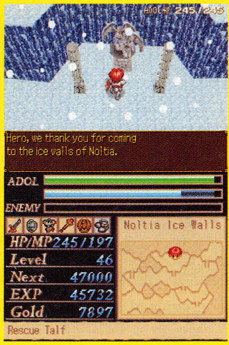
Bludoh
Just relax. You're in the hospital here in the port of Barbado.

ADOL
ENEMY
Bludoh's Clinic
HP 20
Level 1
Next 80
EXP 0
Gold 0
Speak with the villagers



ADOL HP 211/245

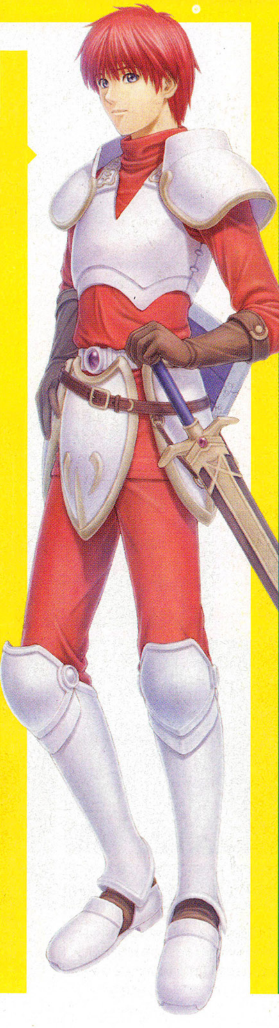
Ruyah
You are my only hope.



ADOL HP 245/245

Hero, we thank you for coming to the ice walls of Noltia.

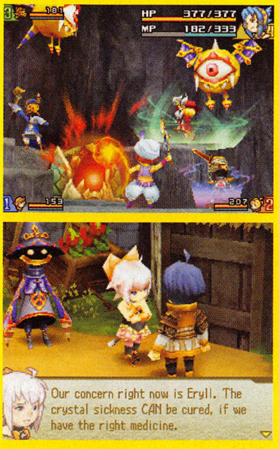
ADOL
ENEMY
Noltia Ice Walls
HP/MP 245/197
Level 46
Next 47000
EXP 45732
Gold 7897
Rescue Talf



E3 Expo 2009

In an effort to address the longtime attendees' complaints of the show floor being too loud, too noisy, and too crowded, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) tried to scale back North America's premier video-game-industry event, E3. However, after experiencing back-to-back disappointing E3 Media and Business Summits, people realized they actually missed the spectacle of the annual exhibition. So on June 2-4, 2009, the E3 Expo is going big. The Los Angeles Convention Center will be packed with bigger booths, more people, and—hopefully—more hot video game news than the past two years' shindigs.

—JUSTIN C.



Our concern right now is Eryll. The crystal sickness CAN be cured, if we have the right medicine.

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: ECHOES OF TIME

Aside from MMORPG Final Fantasy XI, no Final Fantasy has been as multiplayer-focused as the Crystal Chronicles games. And with action-RPG Echoes of Time, Square Enix is making it even easier for people to cooperate. In a stroke of genius, the developers made the DS and Wii versions of the game essentially the same, and both DS and Wii players can go questing together via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. **—JUSTIN C.**

PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **SQUARE ENIX**
RELEASE: **MARCH**

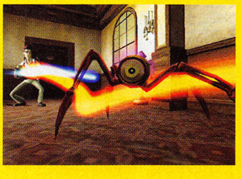
DS
Wii

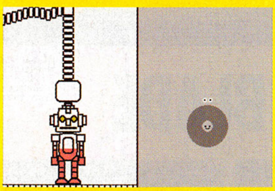
GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME

PUBLISHER:
ATARI
DEVELOPER:
RED FLY STUDIO
RELEASE:
MARCH

Wii DS

New publisher, same solid motion-controlled gameplay: lasso a ghost with the remote (but don't cross the streams!) and ready a trap by gesturing with the nunchuk. With Ghostbusters: The Video Game's release pushed back from its original late-'08 date, the developers say they're using the extra time to polish everything up. **—JUSTIN C.**





RHYTHM HEAVEN

PUBLISHER:
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER:
NINTENDO
RELEASE:
1ST HALF

DS

It's too bad magazines don't come with speakers, because screenshots alone don't tell the story of this wildly addictive rhythm game. Rhythm Heaven is the sequel to one of our favorite GBA titles, Rhythm Tengoku, which, unfortunately, never made it to North America. Like the original, this new edition features dozens of music-based minigames, but now they require you to tap or slide your stylus on the touch screen along with the beat to build robots, sing a song, and commit other random acts of fun. **—CHRIS SL.**

#3

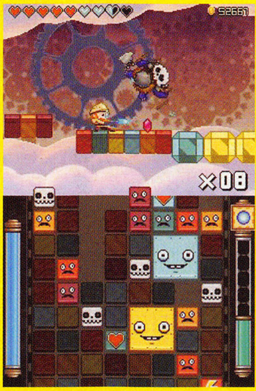
CHRIS SL.'S PICK Much like WarioWare (which is from the same developers), Rhythm Heaven delivers bite-sized nuggets of gaming goodness that are impossible to put down.

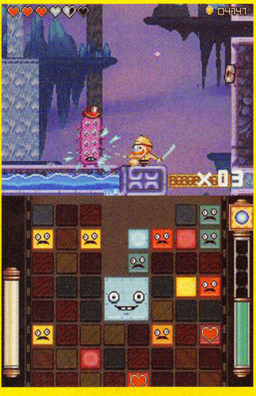
DS

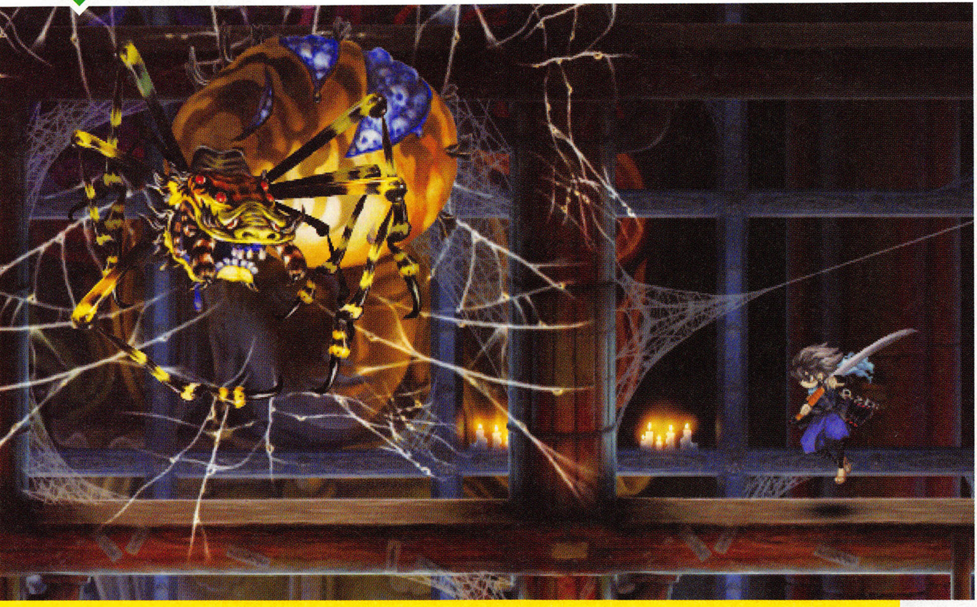
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA TIBURON**
RELEASE: **Q1**

HENRY HATSWORTH IN THE PUZZLING ADVENTURE

A labor of love for a small group of seven game designers at EA's Tiburon studio (best known for the Madden NFL franchise), Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure is a peculiar fusion of Bejeweled-style puzzles and classic 2-D platforming. As you defeat enemies on the upper screen, they turn into blocks on the lower screen, where you must clear them before they rise as ghosts to seek revenge against Henry. A genteel British motif gives the game an infectious charm, and the boisterous Professor Hatsworth has to be an early favorite for best new character of 2009. Tally-ho! **—STEVE T.**



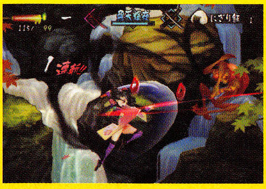


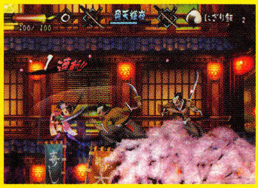


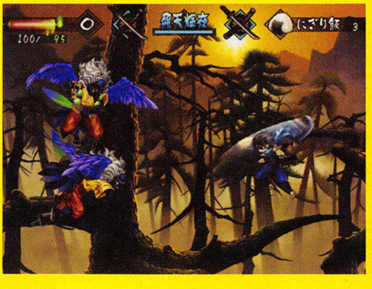
MURAMASA: THE DEMON BLADE

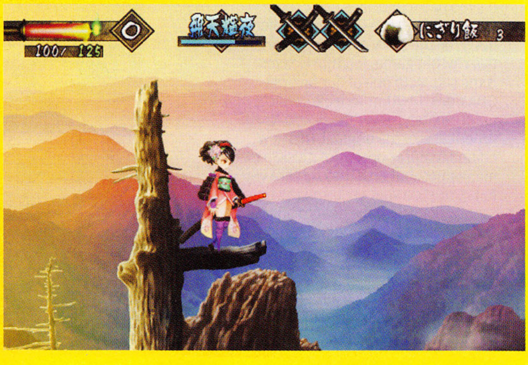
PUBLISHER: **XSEED/ MARVELOUS USA**
DEVELOPER: **VANILLAWARE**
RELEASE: **2ND HALF**
Wii

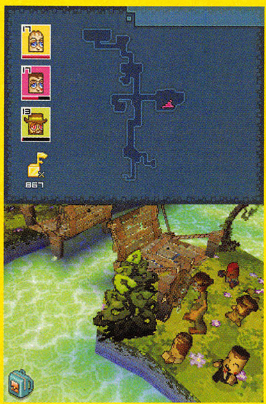
They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and that seems especially true in the case of Muramasa. As you can see, this hand-drawn action-RPG from Vanillaware (makers of the critically acclaimed Odin Sphere for PlayStation 2) is absolutely stunning. And yes, the game really does look like that, only it's even more mind-blowing in motion. The developers are addressing many of the complaints fans had with Odin Sphere—there's no slowdown and there's less retreading the same stages over and over again—and are hard at work on refining the hack-and-slash gameplay. A unique quest for each of the game's two playable characters allows the story to unfold from dual perspectives. But those are enough words for now. Enjoy the pictures. **—STEVE T.**

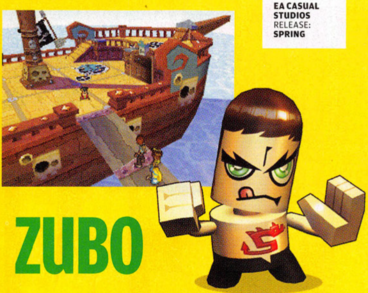












ZUBO

DS

PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CASUAL STUDIOS**
RELEASE: **SPRING**

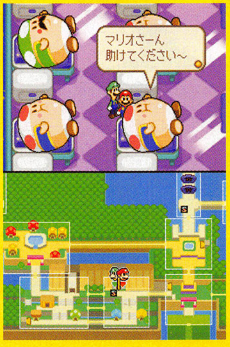
What makes Zubo cool is not only its charming style, but also its clever combat. Fighting the dastardly Big Head's Zombos with your recruited Zubos is a turn-based affair, but the battles rely primarily on rhythm, Elite Beat Agents-style; tap on your Zubo right as the shrinking outline hits the sweet spot for better results. **—JUSTIN C.**

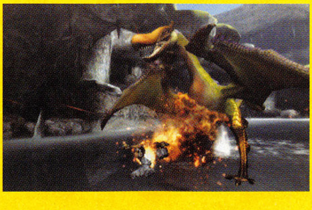
MARIO & LUIGI RPG 3

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **ALPHA DREAM**
RELEASE: **TBD**

DS

Though details about the third installment of the Mario & Luigi series remain scarce, we have high expectations for this role-playing adventure considering the quality of the previous two titles in the series. Like in its predecessors, timing-based techniques will aid you in combat, but there's new content as well: Bowser appears to be a playable character. The story, which at least in part involves an ailment that causes people to balloon to several times their normal size, seems rife with comedic possibilities. **—CHRIS H.**



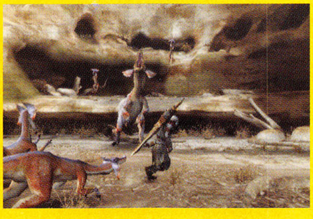


MONSTER HUNTER 3

Wii

PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
RELEASE: **TBD**

Monster Hunter 3 hasn't yet been officially announced for North America, but we have every reason to believe that the online multiplayer dinosaur-battling megahit will reach these shores in 2009. Though insanely popular in Japan, the Monster Hunter franchise has yet to really make a mark on this side of the Pacific, and Capcom execs are prepared to do whatever it takes to make gamers finally pay attention. With loads of quests, plenty of character customization, and massive beasts to fight, there are plenty of reasons to keep an eye on this one. **—CHRIS H.**



Also on the Way

We couldn't detail every single 2009 release in this feature, but here are a few more.

BLUE DRAGON PLUS

PUBLISHER: **IGNITION**
DEVELOPER: **MISTWALKER/FEEL PLUS/BROWNIE BROWN**
RELEASE: **MARCH**

DS

FISHING MASTER: WORLD TOUR

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON**
RELEASE: **Q1**

Wii

HELP WANTED

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON**
RELEASE: **SUMMER**

Wii

LUX-PAIN

PUBLISHER: **IGNITION**
DEVELOPER: **KILLAWARE**
RELEASE: **MARCH**

DS

MARBLE SAGA: KORORINPA

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON**
RELEASE: **SPRING**

Wii

ONECHANBARA: BIKINI ZOMBIE SLAYERS

PUBLISHER: **D3PUBLISHER**
DEVELOPER: **TAMSOFT**
RELEASE: **Q1**

Wii

PUZZLE QUEST: GALACTRIX

PUBLISHER: **D3PUBLISHER**
DEVELOPER: **INFINITE INTERACTIVE**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY**

DS

NOMINATIONS

FOR THE 2008

NINTENDO POWER AWARDS

VOTE!

With another dozen months of gaming on the books, we reflect on the stylus-swooshing and remote-waving year that was 2008. We've seen the rise of WiiWare, the return of Smash Bros., and the world-rocking dominance of the music genre, and have narrowed down the year's top performers. Now it's your turn to weigh in on what titles best defined Nintendo game-playing in aught-eight. Use the list to the right as reference, then go online and let your voice be heard.

STEP 1

Peruse the categories, contemplate your choices, and mark up the list. You'll use it to refer to your picks when you pull the virtual lever online, and keep it as a record of how you voted. Number 2 pencil not required!

PICK ONE
OVERALL GAME OF THE YEAR

- ○ Animal Crossing: City Folk (Wii)
- ○ Bully: Scholarship Edition (Wii)
- ○ Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia (DS)
- ○ Chrono Trigger (DS)
- ○ Final Fantasy IV (DS)
- ○ Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King (WW)
- ○ Kirby Super Star Ultra (DS)
- ○ LostWinds (WW)
- ○ Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
- ○ Mega Man 9 (WW)
- ○ No More Heroes (Wii)
- ○ Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
- ○ Rock Band 2 (Wii)
- ○ Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People (WW)
- ○ Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)
- ○ Tetris Party (WW)
- ○ The World Ends with You (DS)
- ○ World of Goo (WW)

PICK ONE
Wii GAME OF THE YEAR

- ○ Animal Crossing: City Folk
- ○ Bully: Scholarship Edition
- ○ Mario Kart Wii
- ○ No More Heroes
- ○ Rock Band 2
- ○ Super Smash Bros. Brawl

PICK ONE
DS GAME OF THE YEAR

- ○ Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia
- ○ Chrono Trigger
- ○ Final Fantasy IV
- ○ Kirby Super Star Ultra
- ○ Professor Layton and the Curious Village
- ○ The World Ends with You

PICK ONE
WiiWARE GAME OF THE YEAR

- ○ Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a King
- ○ LostWinds
- ○ Mega Man 9
- ○ Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People
- ○ Tetris Party
- ○ World of Goo

PICK ONE
BEST Wii GRAPHICS

- ○ Castlevania Judgment
- ○ Okami
- ○ Sonic Unleashed
- ○ Super Smash Bros. Brawl
- ○ Tomb Raider: Underworld
- ○ Wario Land: Shake It!

PICK ONE
BEST DS GRAPHICS

- ○ Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia
- ○ Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen
- ○ Final Fantasy IV
- ○ GRID
- ○ Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword
- ○ The World Ends with You

PICK ONE
BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

- ○ Chrono Trigger (DS)
- ○ Final Fantasy IV (DS)
- ○ Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon (Wii)
- ○ No More Heroes (Wii)
- ○ Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)
- ○ The World Ends with You (DS)

PICK ONE
BEST SOUND/VOICE ACTING

- ○ Bully: Scholarship Edition (Wii)
- ○ Call of Duty: World at War (Wii)
- ○ No More Heroes (Wii)
- ○ Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
- ○ Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People (WW)
- ○ Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2 (DS)

PICK ONE
BEST MUSIC/RHYTHM GAME

- ○ Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 2 (Wii)
- ○ Guitar Hero On Tour (DS)
- ○ Guitar Hero World Tour (Wii)
- ○ Rock Band 2 (Wii)
- ○ Samba de Amigo (Wii)
- ○ Wii Music (Wii)

PICK ONE
BEST ADVENTURE GAME

- ○ Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney (DS)
- ○ Bully: Scholarship Edition (Wii)
- ○ Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia (DS)
- ○ No More Heroes (Wii)
- ○ Okami (Wii)
- ○ Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People (WW)

PICK ONE
BEST RPG

- ○ Chrono Trigger (DS)
- ○ Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen (DS)
- ○ Final Fantasy IV (DS)
- ○ Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood (DS)
- ○ Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World (Wii)
- ○ The World Ends with You (DS)

PICK ONE
BEST SHOOTER/ACTION GAME

- ○ Bangai-O Spirits (DS)
- ○ Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy (Wii)
- ○ Call of Duty: World at War (Wii)
- ○ Mega Man 9 (WW)
- ○ Metal Slug 7 (DS)
- ○ Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword (DS)

PICK ONE
BEST SPORTS GAME

- ○ Madden NFL 09 All-Play (Wii)
- ○ Mario Super Sluggers (Wii)
- ○ New International Track and Field (DS)
- ○ Sega Superstar Tennis (Wii)
- ○ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 All-Play (Wii)
- ○ We Love Golf! (Wii)

PICK ONE
BEST RACING GAME

- ○ Ferrari Challenge: Trofeo Pirelli (Wii)
- ○ GRID (DS)
- ○ Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
- ○ Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity (Wii)

PICK ONE
BEST PLATFORMER

- ○ Crash: Mind over Mutant (Wii)
- ○ de Blob (Wii)
- ○ Kirby Super Star Ultra (DS)
- ○ Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars (Wii)
- ○ Sonic Unleashed (Wii)
- ○ Wario Land: Shake It! (Wii)

PICK ONE
BEST PUZZLE GAME

- ○ Boom Blox (Wii)
- ○ Dr. Mario Online Rx (WW)
- ○ Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
- ○ Tetris Party (WW)
- ○ World of Goo (WW)

PICK ONE
BEST ALTERNATIVE GAME

- ○ Animal Crossing: City Folk (Wii)
- ○ Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2 (DS)
- ○ Wii Fit (Wii)

PICK ONE
BEST NEW CHARACTER

- ○ Apollo Justice – Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney (DS)
- ○ Blob – de Blob (Wii)
- ○ Neku – The World Ends with You (DS)
- ○ Professor Layton – Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
- ○ Shade – Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood (DS)
- ○ Travis Touchdown – No More Heroes (Wii)

PICK ONE
BEST MULTIPLAYER

- ○ Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates (DS)
- ○ Guitar Hero World Tour (Wii)
- ○ Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
- ○ Rock Band 2 (Wii)
- ○ Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)
- ○ Tetris Party (WW)

PICK ONE
BEST STORY/WRITING

- ○ Chrono Trigger (DS)
- ○ Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen (DS)
- ○ No More Heroes (Wii)
- ○ Professor Layton and the Curious Village (DS)
- ○ Robocalypse (DS)
- ○ The World Ends with You (DS)

PICK ONE
BEST ONLINE FUNCTIONALITY

- ○ Animal Crossing: City Folk (Wii)
- ○ Bomberman Blast (WW)
- ○ Guitar Hero World Tour (Wii)
- ○ Madden NFL 09 All-Play (Wii)
- ○ Mario Kart Wii (Wii)
- ○ Rock Band 2 (Wii)

PICK ONE
BEST FIGHTING GAME

- ○ Bleach: Dark Souls (DS)
- ○ Castlevania Judgment (Wii)
- ○ Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2 (Wii)
- ○ Super Smash Bros. Brawl (Wii)
- ○ The King of Fighters: The Orochi Saga (Wii)
- ○ WWE SmackDown vs .Raw 2009 (Wii)

STEP 2

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STEP 3

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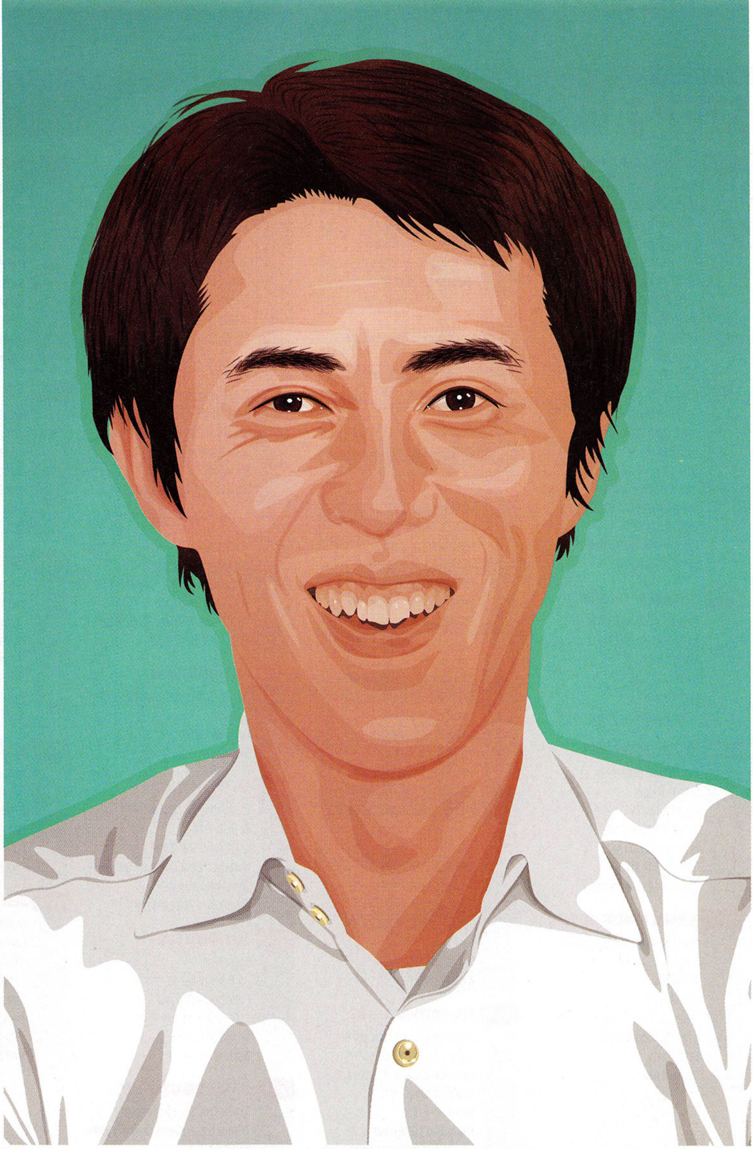
MARCH 2009 NINTENDO POWER

22

Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
February 26, 1964

BIRTHPLACE
Osaka, Japan

POSITION
President of Artoon

BEST KNOWN FOR
Designing Sonic the Hedgehog, turning dreams into reality

FAVORITE FOOD
Fruit

CURRENT PROJECTS
Confidential

Naoto Oshima

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

The 16-bit wars might have gone very differently if it weren't for Naoto Oshima. After all, he's the man responsible for designing one of gaming's most recognizable heroes—Sonic the Hedgehog. Oshima has done a lot more than create Sega's iconic blue mascot, however. In addition to working as a character designer, he's filled the roles of game designer, director, and producer, and he's contributed to some of the most beloved series in gaming, including Phantasy Star and NiGHTS. Despite a great deal of success as part of Sega's renowned Sonic Team, Oshima left the group shortly after the release of Sonic Adventure to found a new studio called Artoon and work on fresh, original projects for a variety of systems. Eventually, Nintendo even tapped Oshima and his team to create Yoshi's Island DS. Though he's busy with his day-to-day responsibilities as president of Artoon, Oshima still finds time for creative endeavors; he recently worked on Majesco's AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon.

NINTENDO POWER **How did you get into the video game business?**

NAOTO OSHIMA Well, I've always wanted to become the Walt Disney of the gaming industry.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Santa Claus.

How have things changed in the gaming industry since you started?

When I first got into the gaming industry, video games had a strong "made in Japan" feel. Now, what was once synonymous with Japan has expanded into a worldwide cultural phenomenon. It's become commonplace enough that those original games are nostalgically viewed as the "classic Japanese games." In the near future, I suspect the current type of games that you could call "Hollywood games" will grow even further as mainstream entertainment.

When it comes to how my own work has changed, I started out in game creation and later got into creating conducive environments for game creation. Now I'm aiming to restructure a sector of the gaming industry.

It seems that you've held a surprising number of different roles as a game creator. What's the reason you've performed such a wide array of duties?

You can't create a game all by yourself. You need everyone's cooperation. I think by taking on different roles, you can help round out areas that need development whenever you form a team.

Is there any particular creative role you enjoy more than others?

I've always loved creating things in general. I like to think that I got to where I am today because I've spent my life constantly looking for new challenges to take on.

In terms of AWAY, I wanted to take advantage of the DS by having players shuffle both the top and bottom screens. That was the most important aspect to me.

While at Sega, you worked on some of the company's most beloved titles, starting with Phantasy Star and Phantasy Star II. Do you have any particularly strong memories of working on those games?

I first joined Sega as a designer. The nature of my work then was graphic design.

Three years later, I came up with Sonic in hopes of becoming a game designer. I was also responsible for the design of pinball maps on Sonic the Hedgehog Spinball.

Can you talk a little bit about how you came up with the character design for Sonic the Hedgehog?

Sonic is the personification of my image of America back then. Relative to Japan and its politics, America had a sense of speed and motion that were dynamic. I wanted to capture that essence in Sonic.

Hirokazu Yasuhara, the stage and gameplay designer for Sonic the Hedgehog, once told us that you originally presented the team with two designs for a character who could roll up into a ball: an armadillo and a hedgehog. Why did the team end up going with the hedgehog?

In that game, the elements of high speed and simple controls were heavily emphasized.

For that reason, we were very picky about having a one-button control system. When we considered how the character would gain speed spinning to ultimately become invincible, we decided that a hedgehog would be more fitting. We thought it was a good choice because the silhouette of it running just looked faster than an armadillo. Since players could only catch a glimpse of the character in game magazines, we really wanted to make sure we had a speedy-looking character.

Why is Sonic blue?

At the time, blue was in fashion. It's also Sega's trademark color and, psychologically, blue has a cool or serene image. We're hopeful that Sonic will stay as clear and vivid as the sky for generations to come.

What do you think of Sonic's current design (with longer legs, green eyes, etc.)?

I entrusted Sonic's new design to Mr. [Yuji] Uekawa, who was the most dependable character designer when I was still with Sega. I think he did a great job.

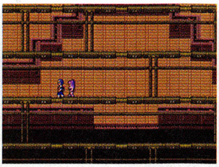
The development team

GAMEOGRAPHY

Oshima got his start at Sega, working on high-profile titles such as the early Phantasy Star games and the Sonic series. He is sometimes credited as Big Island, which is the literal translation of his last name.

ATTK
MAGC
ITEM
TALK
RUN
ALIS
EYILDEAD
HP 15
HP 16
ALIS HP 54 MP 6
MYAU HP 33 MP 0
ODIN HP 35 MP 0

PHANTASY STAR
MASTER SYSTEM, 1988
GRAPHIC DESIGNER



PHANTASY STAR II
SEGA GENESIS, 1989
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

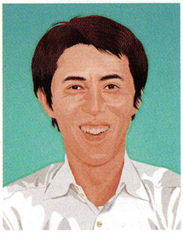
SCORE 200
TIME 0:23
RINGS 29

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
SEGA GENESIS, 1991
CHARACTER DESIGNER

SCORE 0
TIME 0'05"56
RINGS 0

SONIC CD
SEGA CD, 1993
DIRECTOR

Power Profiles



for the original Sonic the Hedgehog consisted of a small but extremely talented group of individuals who have gone on to achieve great things in the industry. What was it like working with that team on a project that was so critical to Sega's success at the time?
I was never really interested in being in the limelight, so I didn't have any special feelings about that. I just think I was blessed with a great experience, working with such a talented staff.

Sonic remains one of the most iconic characters in all of video games. Does he still hold a special place in your heart?
Personally, I think of Sonic as my child. But it was only through the capable hands at Sega that the current Sonic came to be.

How did you transition from character designer to director for Sonic CD?
The president of Sega at that time sent Yuji Naka to America and tasked him with producing the Genesis version, which in effect canceled my planned placement overseas and left me to develop the CD version in Japan.

You also directed NiGHTS into Dreams. Where did the idea for the game's unique dream setting and unorthodox gameplay come from?
What I wanted to do with NiGHTS was to create a new "Peter Pan." Based on that concept, we gathered ideas from our talented staff, and that resulted in NiGHTS.

During the Saturn days, you and the rest of Sonic Team moved away from Sonic the Hedgehog and focused most of your efforts on creating new, original titles. Why was that, and was there ever pressure from Sega to create a new Sonic game for Saturn?
Yes, of course. We announced that "the new Sonic would soar through the skies," and then went on to present NiGHTS.

The formation of Artoon was one of the first times we heard about a group of developers from a big company going independent. Why did you and your colleagues decide to form Artoon to begin with?
We simply wanted to continue to challenge ourselves with new endeavors.

How are things different now that you're running your own independent studio? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages?
Whether we succeed or fail, I'm responsible for everything. I think that's the major difference. In any case, I want to stay true to my principles of gaming to make quality games that everyone can enjoy.

We imagine you have a lot of freedom at a studio like Artoon. How do you decide which projects to work on?
Actually, I probably don't have as much freedom as you'd think. My mission is to make sure my staff and the gamers who buy our products are happy, which means I'm always running around doing something.

What does a typical day consist of for you?
Every day is filled with various project meetings.

How do you balance creative endeavors with running the day-to-day affairs of a company?
My most creative time always turns out to be my days off or late at night.

AWAY was somewhat unusual in that the characters appeared in both 2-D and 3-D. How did that affect your design considerations?
I feel the 3-D characters look very appealing on the DS, having a distinct Japanese style.

What was the general philosophy behind the character designs of AWAY?
We developed the AWAY characters with Japanese manga in mind.

What aspect of creating a video game do you enjoy the most?
The moment when a new gameplay system takes form from a breakthrough concept.

If you weren't making games, what do you think you'd be doing?
I'd be a TV commercial filmmaker.

When you're stumped by a particularly difficult problem while creating a game, what's your process for working through it?
I hand it over to a specialist who can provide a solution. Either that or I take care of it myself.

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
Shigeru Miyamoto, who's created many revolutionary games; and Tomb Raider among 3-D titles.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
Walt Disney and James Cameron. Jean "Moebius" Giraud in terms of artwork.

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
Spending time creating some kind of art, like film or drawings.

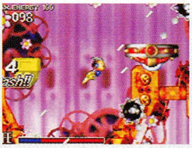
If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
I'd like to be Superman. If I had his powers, I'd earnestly think of ways to use them for the good of the world, making it a happier place.

> *"...I've spent my life constantly looking for new challenges to take on."*

GAMEOGRAPHY

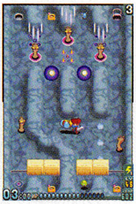
NIGHTS INTO DREAMS
SATURN, 1996
DIRECTOR, VISUAL DESIGNER, CHARACTER DESIGNER

SONIC ADVENTURE
DREAMCAST, 1999
CG MOVIE PRODUCER



PINOBEE: WINGS OF ADVENTURE
GBA, 2001
DIRECTOR

YOSHI'S ISLAND DS
DS, 2006
PRODUCER



AWAY: SHUFFLE DUNGEON
DS, 2008
CHARACTER DESIGNER

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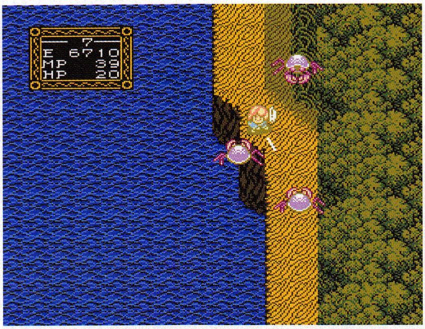
WILLOW

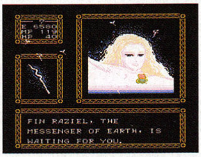
PLATFORM: NES
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1989
COVERED IN ISSUES: 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16
TYPICAL HEIGHT OF A NELWYN (IN FEET): 3.5

Silly Capcom! Movie cash-ins aren't supposed to be *good*.



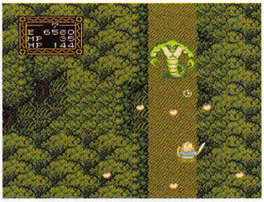
Who needs Val Kilmer when you have purple death crabs?

Instead of turning to the sort of quick-and-dirty hacks who made the awful NES versions of Jaws, Indiana Jones, and Total Recall, Capcom inexplicably entrusted their first film-licensed game to one of their top designers. Fresh off of directing Mega Man, Ghosts 'n Goblins and Bionic Commando, Tokuro Fujiwara diligently transformed Willow—George Lucas and Ron Howard's 1988 *The Hobbit* rip-off—into yet another Capcom classic. But whereas Fujiwara's other masterpieces spawned long-running franchises, Willow was shackled to a middling fantasy film to which Capcom did not own the rights; there would be no sequels, no remakes, and no rereleases. I bet Capcom wishes they'd gone for the quick cash-in instead.



FIN RAZIEL, THE MESSENGER OF EARTH, IS WAITING FOR YOU.

Willow resembles Zelda on the surface, but plays more like Ys or Crystalis, as story and puzzle-solving take a back seat to action and exploration. Willow is a lengthy game, and although it's fairly linear, a maze of alternate paths and hidden treasures makes Willow's world seem much more open than it is. The graphics were stunning for the time, and I still can't figure out how Fujiwara's team pulled off the game's most impressive effect—wind rattles all the grass and trees in the background while Willow is fighting, creating a screen full of animation with little in the way of slowdown or flicker.



The unusual level of polish isn't limited to the graphics. Willow's numerous spells are well balanced and provide several ways to approach the game's menagerie of foes. The difficulty increases smoothly as you progress, and the ability to grind your way to higher levels and higher stats keeps the game from ever getting frustrating.

If only Capcom had churned out a crappy port of the arcade game (see sidebar) and rechristened this gem "Dwarf Quest" instead, we might have Dwarf Quest XIV on the cover of this very issue. Instead, Willow now lies forgotten, its movie rights expired, and its few remaining fans—many now well into their 30s—are losing more of their wits, memories, and bowel control with each passing day. We old-timers often complain about how much movie-licensed games sucked on the NES, but really, it was so much worse when they *didn't*. —**CASEY L.**

Can you believe we didn't get sued by the Tolkien estate?

DUELS 'N DWARVES

Outside of a few throwaway cameos, the NES Willow had suspiciously little to do with the movie. Surprisingly, it's the action-packed coin-op game (also by Capcom) that is the more faithful adaptation. Players alternate between Warwick Davis's spellcasting Willow and Val Kilmer's sword-wielding Madmartigan in six short but tough levels that roughly sketch out the heroes' journey of the film.

The arcade version of Willow plays like a faster-paced Ghosts 'n Goblins game, even though Fujiwara wasn't involved in its development. Defeated foes drop gold coins, which you can spend on defensive boosts, healing, and extra lives at the shops scattered throughout each stage. There isn't much in the way of power-ups or moves, so it's a pretty narrow game, but it sure looked nice at the time.

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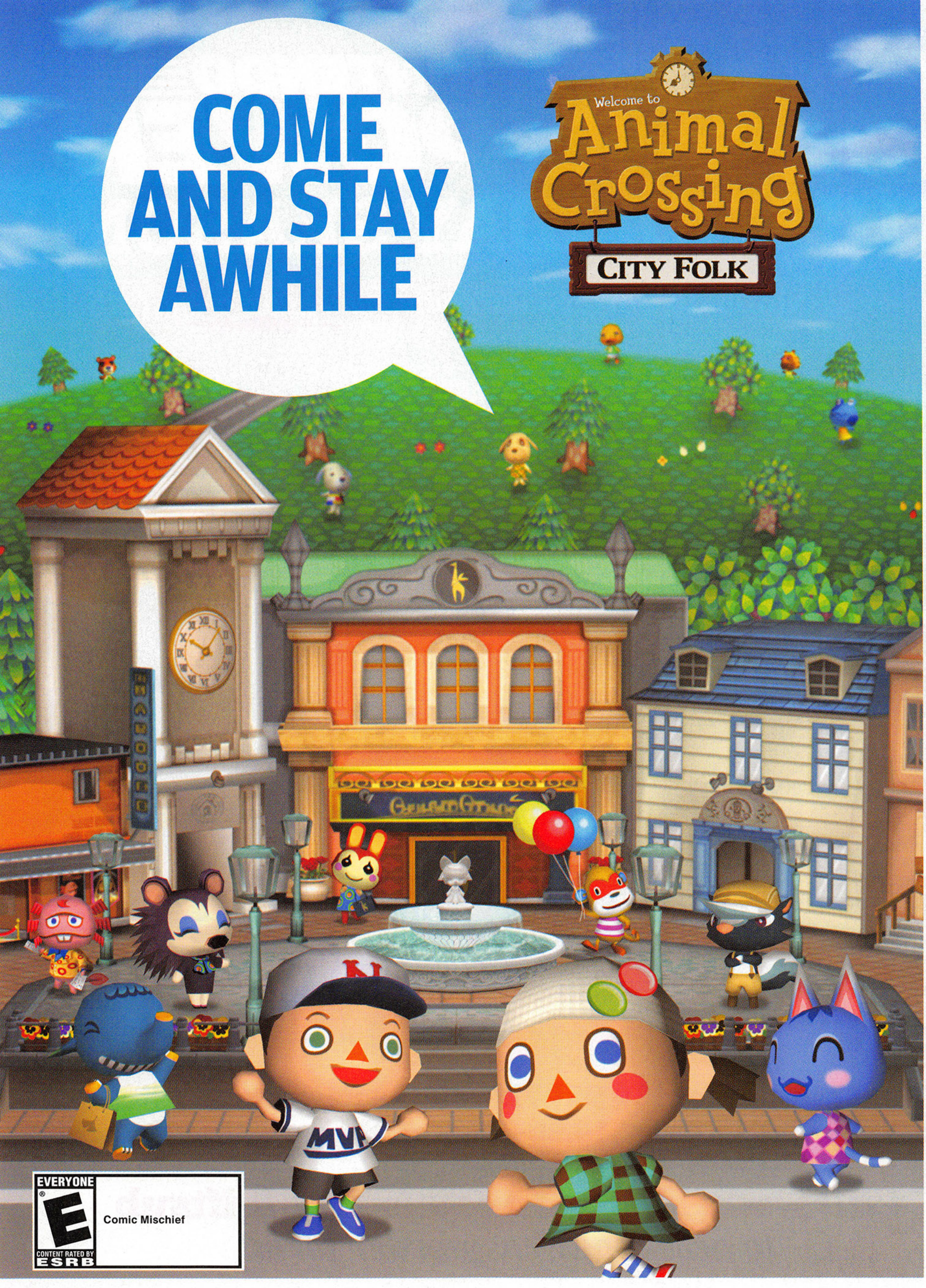
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JANUARY 2009

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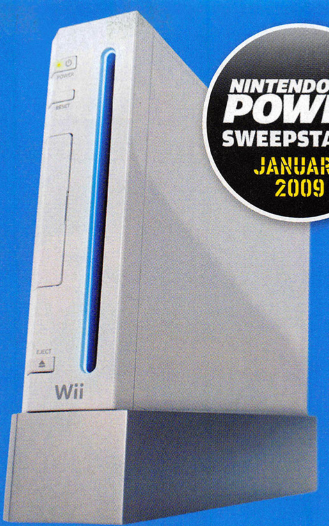

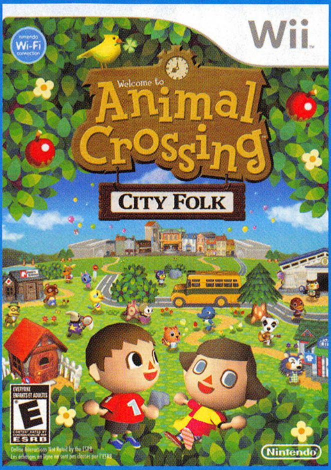

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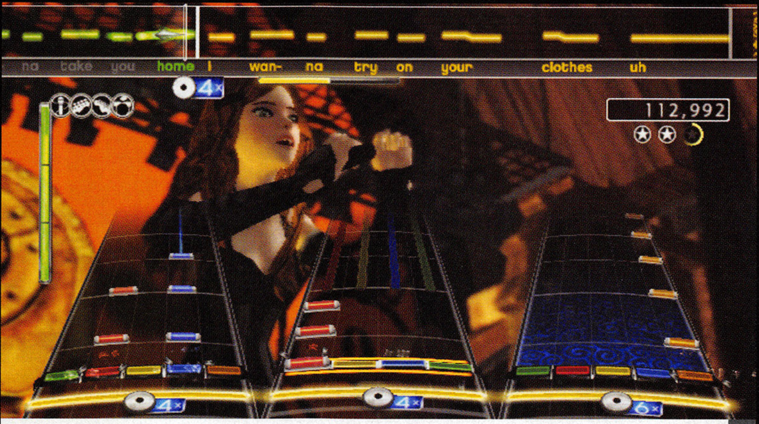
REVIEWS

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF ALL THE LATEST GAMES

Will **Rock Band 2** melt your face off? Turn the page to find out! (Pro-tip: Put on a welder's mask first.)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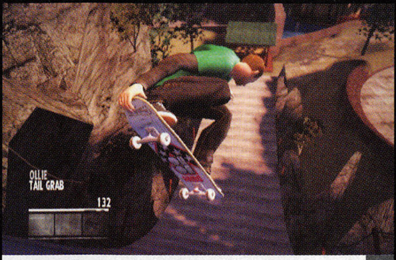
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FALLEN KING 89

RUNE FACTORY 2: A FANTASY HARVEST MOON 90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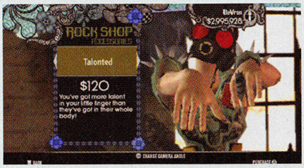
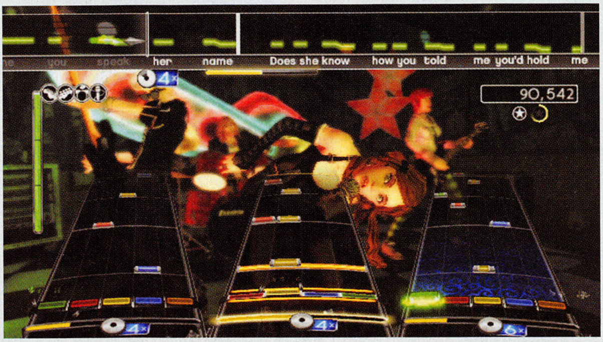


You've got more talent in your little finger than they've got in their whole body!



Rock Harder

ROCK BAND 2

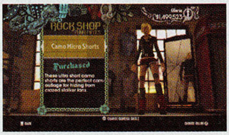
RATING: 9.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **MTV GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **PI STUDIOS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

When Rock Band was released on Wii earlier this year, as good as it was, I definitely felt disappointed. Sure, the rhythm-based gameplay was fun, especially when playing with a full band of friends, but the Wii version was lacking a create-a-character mode, online play, downloadable songs, and a real Band World Tour mode (the game had a list of songs instead of having you travel to different venues around the globe), firmly setting it behind the other versions.

What a difference six months make: Rock Band 2 on Wii has everything from the already-released PS3 and Xbox 360 versions. You can create a rocker (or several—a necessity if you want to make your own four-person band) with a vast array of customization options, from hairstyles to shoes to everything in between. Sadly, you cannot use your Miis, but you can get pretty creative with your custom rock stars, making them more punk or goth or heavy metal or more of a mélange. From there, you can enter the Tour mode, starting your odyssey to become the biggest band in the world by amassing as much fame and fortune as possible. The more fans you have, the more venues you unlock; the more money you have, the more accessories (clothing, instruments, etc.) you can purchase for your created characters. What's especially cool is how the online play is integrated with this mode; for example, your band can compete in online Battle of the Bands challenges, pitting your scores against your online rivals'.

With 84 songs on the disc, Rock Band 2 offers a lot of musical variety, but you can download even more songs via the in-game music store. Simply add Wii Points in the Wii Shop Channel, then start up the game and preview and purchase songs. Downloaded songs go into the Wii's internal memory. If that's full, you can use an SD card, and the songs will play directly from the card. Being able to download new tracks every week is a nice touch that helps extend the game's lifespan until the inevitable sequel.



These ultra short camo shorts are the perfect camouflage for hiding from crazed stalker fans.

All of these bells and whistles ultimately don't matter if the gameplay isn't up to snuff, of course, but Rock Band 2 remains as fun as ever. Because the original game was so solid, there haven't really been any changes to the gameplay, though the hardware has gotten a few upgrades. Most notably, the drum pads are quieter, and the kick pedal feels sturdier thanks to the metal plate covering it. The guitars feel the same; I still prefer the Guitar Hero guitars, though, so it's nice that they're compatible with Rock Band 2. The mic also is unchanged; no need to fix what ain't broke. Naturally, if you already have Rock Band, all of your equipment will work with this game. Buying more Rock Band within six months of the last one is an expensive prospect, but Rock Band 2 is the true Rock Band experience. —**JUSTIN C.**

WRITERS' BLOCK

WHAT GAMES SHOULD THE READERS VOTE FOR IN THE 2008 POWER AWARDS?

Justin Cheng

No More Heroes is nominated for a lot of things, so please vote for it at least once. I'd like to see this great game get *some* sort of recognition.

Chris Hoffman

2008 was the year of the Blue Bomber's comeback. Mega Man 9 deserves to take the Best Shooter/Action Game and Best WiiWare Game categories.

Tom Holoien

One game stands out from all the rest I played in '08: Professor Layton. It's easily the best puzzle game, but it deserves your vote for DS game of the year.

Casey Loe

I want to see a clean sweep for The World Ends With You. Even in categories that don't make sense, like Best Racing Game. *Clean sweep!*

Chris Shepperd

Professor Layton deserves to be DS game of the year. It's the quintessential DS title: good touch screen use, good dual screen use...everything.

George Sinfield

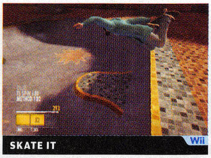
There are no losers in the Best New Character category, but I hope that readers will think back to Kirby and the Slime when selecting puffy paintball de Blob.

Chris Slate

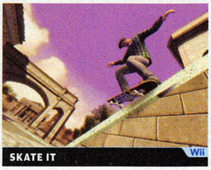
I hope Mario Kart Wii wins Best Online Functionality. It's a blast to race people from around the world, and the tournaments are super-addictive!

Steve Thomason

I wholeheartedly support Casey in his support of The World Ends with You. And if the game doesn't win multiple awards, we'll come to your home and end *you*.



SKATE IT



SKATE IT

SKATE IT

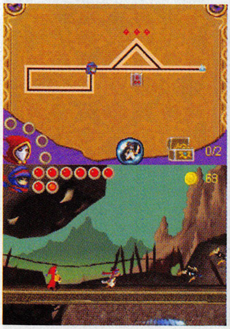
RATING: 6.0

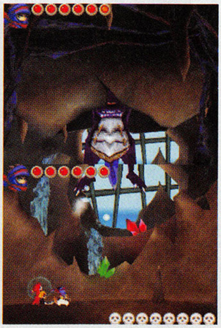
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA MONTREAL**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Last year EA changed the way skateboarding games are played with the hit Skate, which had players controlling their skateboard not with a number of complicated button presses but rather with simple flicks of the analog sticks. Unfortunately, whereas the previous games controlled well, Skate It doesn't measure up.

There's a lot to like about Skate It. It has a long story mode that has you skating locations all around the world, and multiplayer modes to keep you and your friends busy for a long time. It even offers you three control options to choose from, but unfortunately none of them work particularly well. You can play with a Wii remote alone, steering by twisting and flicking the remote to do tricks, but I found it easier to steer using the nunchuk. Unfortunately, the game frequently misinterprets your motions, which can make it difficult to complete tasks such as landing the same trick multiple times. The third control scheme, using the Wii Balance Board, is fun to play with but its inaccuracy makes completing objectives nearly impossible.

Skate It is a valiant attempt to capitalize on Wii's motion controls, but it doesn't compare to Skate. Save your money for a better action-sports game. **—TOM H.**





Falling Up

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FALLEN KING

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT CASABLANCA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

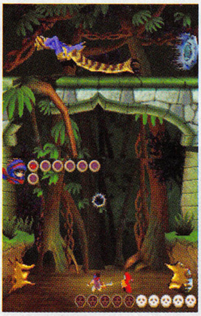
Despite having a new-school touch-screen interface, Prince of Persia: The Fallen King is very much in touch with its roots. If you remember the original Prince of Persia, now closing in on 20 years old, this one will definitely take you back.

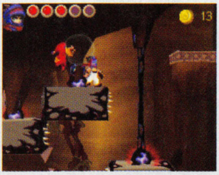
Like the PC original, this is a side-scrolling platformer. There are bad guys to swipe at with the Prince's trusty sword, but they don't show their faces very often. Mainly, the challenge comes from finding a way to jump, climb, slide, and roll from point A to point B without tripping over the wrong ledge and falling to a grisly death.

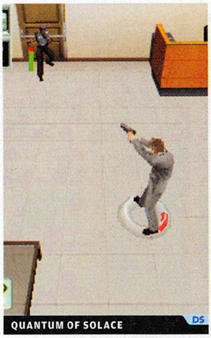
The PC Prince of Persia was a very deliberate, slow-paced game. It couldn't help it—a keyboard has never been the best control device for a platformer. Controlling this DS game, on the other hand, is practically effortless. Moving the prince around with the stylus is so intuitive that it almost feels too simple sometimes. Jumping gaps, smashing boulders, ducking under obstacles, and skidding down walls all require just a few easy context-sensitive taps and scratches along the touch screen.

Fallen King's graphics are fairly simple, and the big-headed character artwork seems a little cartoony compared to the overall tone of the series. When it comes to control, though, this is the model of a fun all-stylus action game—easy to pick up, not so easy to put down.

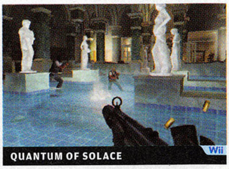
—DAVID S.







QUANTUM OF SOLACE



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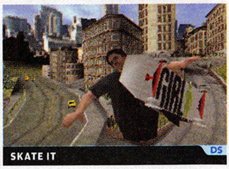

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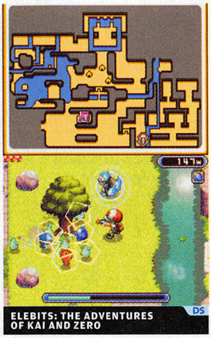
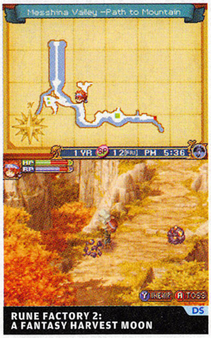


ELEBITS: THE ADVENTURES OF KAI AND ZERO



RUNE FACTORY 2: A FANTASY HARVEST MOON

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

RATING: **6.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **VICARIOUS VISIONS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

At first glance, Quantum of Solace seems impressive. The clever control scheme allows players to move, shoot, tackle, sneak, and use a wide variety of melee attacks with simple stylus actions. The 3-D graphics look good, and the stat-boosting playing cards and purchasable skill upgrades add a fun RPG-style twist.

But frustration quickly sets in when the game fails to register certain touch-screen commands, and its mistakes get you killed repeatedly. Worse yet, Quantum of Solace can't muster a quantum of variety, as each of the film's action scenes has been reduced to a simple maze of rooms packed with the same enemy operatives wearing the same suits and employing the same tactics. The game's ideas are good, but the execution doesn't cut it. **—CASEY L.**

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

RATING: **5.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **BEENOX**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Loosely based on the film of the same name (and with most of the game's levels composed of areas from the previous movie), Quantum of Solace delivers about the quality you expect from licensed games: mediocre. This first-person shooter plays fine a lot of the time, but the frame rate can get extremely choppy and the graphics go from so-so to downright ugly. Additionally, the single-player game is short and has a poorly constructed narrative—the developers don't want to spoil the film for you, but there's little cohesion as you go from one area to the next. On the plus side, I didn't experience lag when playing online, and the Wii-exclusive four-player split-screen multiplayer mode can be fun. **—JUSTIN C.**

SKATE IT

RATING: **5.5**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EXIENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

There is something unsettling about a DS control scheme that requires vigorous use of the stylus coupled with Control Pad or face-button manipulation. You spend more time keeping a grip on the handheld than dealing with the game's challenges. Skate It's clever Flickit system has you swipe with the stylus over a skateboard graphic to trigger ollies, flip tricks, and manuals. Turning, midair spins, and grab tricks, however, require button presses, which will tax all but the most dexterous players' abilities. The game's environments are well-rendered collections of ramps, kick boxes, rails, and pipes, though the arenas are much more generic than the globe-spanning storyline would suggest. The carefully doled-out activities in each location will make you yearn for the skate-anywhere-do-anything openness of the Tony Hawk games. **—GEORGE S.**

ELEBITS: THE ADVENTURES OF KAI AND ZERO

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero elevates the hide-and-seek formula of its Wii predecessor to the next level and beyond. Shaking objects and snagging power-generating Elebits is actually the game's weakest part; the adventure really revolves around a Pokémon-esque critter-collection system that lets you acquire a variety of special Elebits, each with their own abilities, that are integral to solving the game's many environmental puzzles and exploring the varied worlds. Even though the abilities aren't explained very well (thus leading to some obtuse challenges), the puzzles and abilities add up to a fun quest, although without much in the way of combat (outside of nifty boss fights), the action does tend to drag. Nonetheless, Elebits is a cute, enjoyable diversion. **—CHRIS H.**

RUNE FACTORY 2: A FANTASY HARVEST MOON

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **NATSUME**
DEVELOPER: **NEVERLAND**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Innovation is a rare visitor to the bucolic farmlands of the Harvest Moon series. The original Rune Factory shook things up by adding a splash of action-RPG swordplay to the series' usual crop-watering and lass-romancing formula, but this episode offers only minor refinements. Among them you'll find a side-quest system that provides new reasons to interact with the game's charming cast, and a generational twist that provides a shot of energy halfway into the quest. But the game still slows down dramatically whenever more than three characters appear onscreen, ruining the monster-companion system and tarnishing the game's otherwise-lovely graphics. And the tempo remains slow, with both the limited action and the daily farm chores growing repetitive quickly. Rune Factory has a lot of potential, but it will take more than incremental upgrades to reach it. **—CASEY L.**

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

RETRO GAME CHALLENGE
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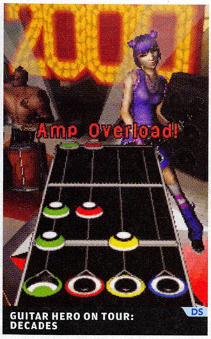
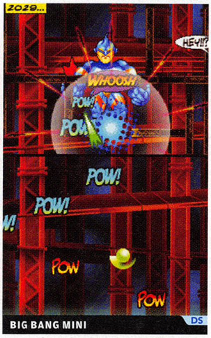
DS


GUITAR HERO ON TOUR: DECADES


BIG BANG MINI

TONY HAWK'S MOTION

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

RATING: 8.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **TREYARCH**
ESRB: **MATURE**

The latest Call of Duty doesn't bring anything radically new to the threadbare World War II setting, but it's a surprisingly polished effort that stands in the top tier of Wii first-person shooters. The single-player campaign is cinematic, intense, and nicely paced, with lots of mission variety as you switch back and forth between the Soviets and the US. Everything looks and sounds terrific—much better than what we usually get from multiplatform affairs—and the action feels great thanks to rock-solid controls and a fantastic selection of weapons (especially the flamethrower). Online play is limited to run-of-the-mill deathmatches, but it runs smoothly even with eight players. Call of Duty will always sell big based on its name alone, so kudos to Activision and Treyarch for not phoning this one in. **—STEVE T.**

TONY HAWK'S MOTION

RATING: 4.0

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **CREAT STUDIOS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

The "motion" in Tony Hawk's Motion comes from a special GBA cartridge. After you plug it in, moving the DS steers a virtual skater or snowboarder, while the buttons and touch screen let you pull off ollies, manuals, and more complicated tricks.

Someday, somebody is going to make something fun out of this concept, but the folks making this game haven't gotten there yet. The tilt-motion controls are too sluggish and unresponsive, which makes it hard to get up to speed and into a groove, and tilting the screen at weird angles spoils your aim when you're trying to nail precise jumps and rail-slides. The technology itself is solid, though—it's a lot like what made WarioWare Twisted! a cult classic—so hopefully Activision won't give up on it right away. **—DAVID S.**

RETRO GAME CHALLENGE

RATING: 8.0

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **XSEED**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
ESRB: **RATING PENDING**

Retro Game Challenge has an interesting lineage. It's based on a Japanese TV show about a man who plays old video games. This time, though, Game Master Arino (the real-life host of the show) declares that *you* must take on these classic games. The thing is, there are no actual classic games. Instead you face eight new games that look as though they popped out of an NES. Each title has a set of challenges that must be cleared, and success allows you to enjoy the game in Free Play mode. If you get stuck, check out the in-game magazines for tips and cheat codes. Prepare to tackle shooters, platformers, racing games, and even an RPG. Great gameplay and a goofy sense of humor make this a terrific tribute to the 8-bit experience. **—PHIL T.**

GUITAR HERO ON TOUR: DECADES

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **VICARIOUS VISIONS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

You gotta question the value of Guitar Hero on DS. Although it's nice to bust out a few hits while you're on the road, banging the screen with the pick and yelling into the microphone is hardly bus-friendly. And because it's a handheld game, it becomes more difficult the more you rock out: you have to remain pretty still to see the notes and strum. Additionally, Decades doesn't build much upon the first On Tour game; the main attraction is the new batch of songs. The selections are fine, but their transpositions into the game tend to be repetitive and boring. The audio quality leaves something to be desired, too—without headphones, the tunes sound little better than they would coming out of an old transistor radio. **—CHRIS SH.**

BIG BANG MINI

RATING: 8.5

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SOUTHPEAK**
DEVELOPER: **ARKEDO STUDIO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

A quirky shooter in which your lower-screen ship launches fireworks at upper-screen foes, Big Bang Mini plays like an imaginative take on Space Invaders. At first the concept seems too narrow to justify even its $20 price tag, but as you unlock new worlds and modes, Big Bang Mini evolves in imaginative and surprising ways.

As good as it is, Big Bang Mini does miss a few opportunities. Using the stylus for both firing and movement sometimes gets you killed by firing a shot when you intended to evade—I wish using the Control Pad were an option. It's also disappointing that you have to play all 10 of each world's levels in a row, which keeps their interesting mix of mechanics from being explored at different difficulty levels. Nevertheless, Big Bang Mini offers plenty of satisfying action at a bargain price. **—CASEY L.**

ALSO THIS MONTH

If you're craving more Wii music games, MTV Games has you covered with **Rock Band Track Pack Vol. 2** and the Wal-Mart-exclusive **AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack**. Like Track Pack Vol. 1, both titles give you a stripped-down Rock Band experience, so make sure you really like the song lists before purchasing.... Nintendo's **Personal Trainer: Cooking** is in stores now, providing recipes, step-by-step cooking help, and meal suggestions via your DS.... Anyone remember Radio Allergy, the cancelled GameCube shooter? It's finally landing, but now it's on Wii, and it's bundled with a couple other shoot-'em-ups in UFO's **Ultimate Shooting Collection**.

[REVIEWS ARCHIVE]

30? Rock!

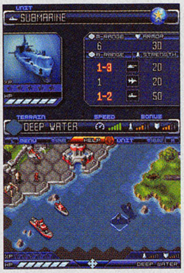
It's a veritable gamesplosion here at Nintendo Power! In addition to all of the exciting games of '09 that you've no doubt already read about (if you haven't, please do), we reviewed 30 whole games last issue! While this issue's reviews section is not quite as impressive, quantitatively speaking, at least you have a lot to look forward to as we head into the new year.

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

Wii

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Alone in the Dark	4.0	Atari	232	M
• Animal Crossing: City Folk	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Backyard Baseball '09	N/A	Atari	231	E
Baroque	3.0	Atlus	227	T
Battle of the Bands	7.0	THQ	228	T
Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy	8.5	Majesco	229	E
Bomberman Land	5.0	Hudson	226	E
Boogie SuperStar	7.0	Electronic Arts	235	E10+
Boom Blox	8.0	Electronic Arts	229	E
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	7.0	Ubisoft	235	M
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Rockstar	227	T
Castle of Shikigami III	7.0	Aksys	228	T
Castlevania Judgment	7.0	Konami	236	T
Celebrity Sports Showdown	4.5	EA Sports	235	E
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	T
Cooking Mama World Kitchen	6.5	Majesco	236	E
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 2	8.0	Konami	234	E10+
de Blob	8.0	THQ	234	E
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.0	Eidos	230	T
Deca Sports	N/A	Hudson	229	E
Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed	7.0	THQ	227	T
Dokapon Kingdom	8.5	Atlus	235	E10+
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	7.0	Square Enix	226	T
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	SouthPeak	228	E10+
Emergency Heroes	N/A	Ubisoft	230	E10+
Emergency Mayhem	N/A	Codemasters	228	T
FaceBreaker K.O. Party	5.0	Electronic Arts	235	T
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.5	System 3	233	E
FIFA Soccer 09 All-Play	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	7.5	Square Enix	231	E10+
• Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	7.0	RedOctane	232	T
• Guitar Hero World Tour	8.5	Activision	236	T
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.5	Natsume	233	E
The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.0	Sega	227	M
The Incredible Hulk	3.5	Sega	231	T
Iron Man	5.5	Sega	229	T
Jumper	N/A	Brash	226	T
Karaoke Revolution Presents American Idol Encore	N/A	Konami	226	E
The King of Fighters: The Orochi Saga	8.0	SNK Playmore	235	T
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.0	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E10+
Line Rider 2: Unbound	5.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Lost in Blue: Shipwrecked	6.5	Konami	235	E10+
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
• Madden NFL 09 All-Play	9.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
• Mario Kart Wii	9.0	Nintendo	228	E
Mario Super Sluggers	7.5	Nintendo	233	E
MiniCopter: Adventure Flight	6.5	Aksys	228	E
MLB 2K8	6.5	2K Sports	227	E
MLB Power Pros 2008	7.0	2K Sports	232	E
Monster Lab	6.5	Eidos	236	E10+
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	8.0	Gamecock	236	E10+
MySims Kingdom	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2	8.0	Tomy	235	T
• NBA Live 09 All-Play	4.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
NCAA Football 09 All-Play	5.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
Need for Speed Undercover	6.5	Electronic Arts	236	T
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	N/A	Capcom	236	E
NHL 2K9	7.0	2K Sports	234	E10+
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
No More Heroes	8.0	Ubisoft	226	M
Obscure: The Aftermath	7.0	Ignition	227	M
Octomania	N/A	Conspiracy	227	E
Okami	7.5	Capcom	228	T
Opoona	7.0	Koei	227	E10+
Order Up!	7.0	Zoo Games	232	E
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	7.5	Crave	227	E10+
Pop Star Guitar	N/A	XS Games	236	T
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	5.5	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Rock Band	8.0	MTV Games	231	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 1	6.5	MTV Games	232	T
Rock Revolution	4.5	Konami	235	T
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	7.0	Tecmo	236	T
Sam & Max Season One	7.0	The Adventure Company	233	T
• Samba de Amigo	9.0	Sega	234	E
Sega Bass Fishing	5.0	Sega	227	E
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E10+
Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	7.0	Ubisoft	236	E10+
SimCity Creator	6.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1	8.5	SNK Playmore	233	T
Sonic Unleashed	8.0	Sega	236	E10+
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6.5	Activision	236	T
SPRay	3.0	Tecmo	235	E10+
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels	4.0	LucasArts	236	T
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.5	LucasArts	233	T
Summer Sports: Paradise Island	3.5	Destineer	228	E
• Super Smash Bros. Brawl	10	Nintendo	226	T
Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World	8.0	Namco Bandai	236	T
Target: Terror	N/A	Konami	227	M
• Tiger Woods PGA Tour All-Play	8.5	Electronic Arts	233	E
TNA Impact!	5.0	Midway	235	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	7.0	Eidos	236	T
Top Spin 3	7.0	2K Sports	229	E
Ultimate Band	6.0	Disney	235	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
Wario Land: Shake It!	8.0	Nintendo	234	E
We Cheer	6.0	Namco Bandai	235	E10+
• We Love Golf!	8.5	Capcom	231	E10+
We Ski	6.0	Namco Bandai	229	E
• Wii Music	N/A	Nintendo	235	E
Wild Earth: African Safari	N/A	Majesco	228	E
Worms: A Space Oddity	6.0	THQ	227	E10+
• WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	8.0	THQ	236	T
WWII Aces	3.0	Destineer	226	T

REVIEWER NOTES



TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR

The DS version of Tom Clancy's Endwar was released rather stealthily, which is a bit of a shame because it offers some solid Advance Wars-style strategy. The graphics are a bit plain-looking, but it's got plenty of tactical depth across multiple campaigns. Armchair generals hankering for some grid-based conflict could do much worse. **—STEVE T.**

TRANSFORMERS ANIMATED: THE GAME

Our review of Transformers Animated neglected to mention the best part—it makes a transforming sound if you close the DS lid while playing! The teamwork-oriented gameplay ain't bad either. **—CHRIS H.**

STAR WARS THE CLONE WARS: LIGHTSABER DUELS

Lightsaber Duels is fun enough when you're playing the multiplayer mode since the playing field is pretty even, but the single-player game can be a bit frustrating at times. Unfortunately, the motion controls don't always work as well as they should for you, but the AI opponents have no such problems. **—JUSTIN C.**

NINTENDO DS				
Age of Empires: Mythologies	7.0	THQ	236	E10+
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	8.0	Capcom	226	T
Arkanoid DS	6.5	Square Enix	230	E
Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	7.5	Ubisoft	226	T
AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon	7.0	Majesco	235	E10+
Bangai-O Spirits	8.0	D3PA	232	E10+
Bleach: Dark Souls	8.5	Sega	234	T
Brain Quest Grades 3 & 4	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E
Brain Quest Grades 5 & 6	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E
Brain Voyage	N/A	Eidos	228	E
Bratz: Super Babyz	N/A	THQ	226	E
Cake Mania 2	6.5	Majesco	230	E
• Call of Duty: World at War	N/A	Activision	236	T
Carnival Games	4.5	2K Games	231	E
• Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.0	Konami	235	T
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	E10+
Chrono Trigger	9.0	Square Enix	236	E10+
Civilization Revolution	7.5	2K Games	231	E10+
Code Lyoko: Fall of Xana	N/A	The Game Factory	230	E
Commando: Steel Disaster	N/A	XS Games	229	E10+
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E
Crosswords DS	N/A	Nintendo	228	E
Disgaea DS	7.5	NIS America	233	T
Dragon Ball: Origins	7.0	Atari	235	E
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7.5	Square Enix	233	E10+
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob Squarepants Edition	7.0	THQ	234	E
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	SouthPeak	228	E10+
Drone Tactics	7.0	Atlus	229	E10+
Dungeon Explorer: Warriors of Ancient Arts	6.5	Hudson	226	T
Etrian Odyssey II: Heroes of Lagaard	8.5	Atlus	230	E10+
Exit DS	7.5	Square Enix	234	E
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	6.0	System 3	233	E
Final Fantasy IV	9.0	Square Enix	231	E10+
• Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	7.0	Square Enix	226	E10+
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	7.0	Square Enix	230	E10+
Gauntlet	7.5	Eidos	236	T
• GRID	8.5	Codemasters	230	E
Guitar Hero: On Tour	8.0	RedOctane	232	E10+
Harvest Moon DS Cute	7.5	Natsume	226	E
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	7.0	Natsume	231	E
Homie Rollerz	N/A	Destineer	226	E
The Incredible Hulk	7.5	Sega	231	E10+
Insecticide	6.5	Gamecock	226	E10+
Iron Man	5.0	Sega	229	E10+
Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns	5.0	Atlus	232	T
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	5.0	Aksys	229	T
Kirby Super Star Ultra	9.0	Nintendo	234	E
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
The Legend of Kage 2	8.0	Square Enix	234	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.5	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E
Line Rider 2: Unbound	6.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ	5.0	Destineer	235	T
Lock's Quest	7.0	THQ	234	E
Looney Tunes: Cartoon Conductor	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Lost in Blue 3	5.5	Konami	227	E10+
Luminous Arc 2	7.0	Atlus	236	T
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E
Madden NFL 09	N/A	Electronic Arts	232	E
Master of the Monster Lair	6.5	Atlus	235	E10+
• Mega Man Star Force 2	7.0	Capcom	230	E
Metal Slug 7	7.5	Ignition	236	T
Mister Slime	6.0	SouthPeak	230	E
MLB 2K8 Fantasy All-Stars	6.5	2K Sports	228	E
Monster Lab	8.0	Eidos	236	E10+
Moon	7.5	Mastiff	236	T
The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	N/A	Vivendi Games	231	T
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	5.0	Gamecock	236	E
Myst	5.0	Empire Interactive	227	E
Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	6.5	Nintendo	234	E
Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer	6.5	Sega	226	E
• N+	7.0	Atari	228	E
Nancy Drew: The Mystery of the Clue Bender Society	N/A	Majesco	232	E10+
Naruto: Ninja Destiny	7.0	Tomy/D3PA	226	T
• Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2	6.5	Tomy	234	E10+
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	6.0	Capcom	236	E
• New International Track and Field	8.0	Konami	232	E10+
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	8.5	Tecmo	227	T
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
Ninjatown	8.0	SouthPeak	235	E
Petz: Bunnyz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
Petz Wild Animals: Tigerz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Pop Cutie! Street Fashion Simulation	6.0	Koei	233	E
Populous	7.0	XSEED	234	T
• Prey the Stars	5.5	Koei	234	E10
Princess on Ice	N/A	Aksys	235	E
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.0	NIS America	228	E
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Robocalypse	7.5	Tecmo	235	E10+
Rock Revolution	5.0	Konami	235	E10+
Rondo of Swords	6.5	Atlus	228	E10+
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E
Shaun the Sheep	4.0	D3Publisher	235	E
Shaun White Snowboarding	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	8.0	Sega	234	E
Soul Bubbles	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E
Space Invaders Extreme	8.0	Square Enix	230	E
• Spectrobes: Beyond the Portals	8.0	Disney	235	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Spore Creatures	8.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance	6.0	LucasArts	236	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	6.0	LucasArts	233	T
Summon Night: Twin Age	7.5	Atlus	229	E10+
Super Dodgeball Brawlers	6.5	Aksys	229	E
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop 3	N/A	Namco Bandai	230	E
• Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	6.0	Tecmo	235	E
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys	7.0	Ignition	228	E10+
Theresia	N/A	Aksys	235	M
Time Hollow	7.0	Konami	234	T
• Tom Clancy's EndWar	N/A	Ubisoft	236	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	N/A	Eidos	236	T
Top Spin 3	6.0	2K Sports	229	E
Tornado	6.0	Ignition	234	E
Transformers Animated: The Game	7.0	Activision	235	E
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.5	Atlus	231	T
Unsolved Crimes	4.5	Empire	234	T
• Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise	7.0	THQ	234	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
What's Cooking? Jamie Oliver	N/A	Atari	235	E
• The World Ends With You	9.0	Square Enix	228	T
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	4.0	THQ	236	T
Zenses: Oceans	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Zenses: Rainforest	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Zoo Tycoon 2 DS	7.0	THQ	226	E

CRASH: MIND OVER MUTANT (Wii)

Crash Bandicoot hasn't had the best reputation in recent years, but his latest game, Mind over Mutant, is actually quite enjoyable. It's got all the platforming goodness a gamer could want (wall-climbing, vine-swinging, double-jumping, etc.), and the use of enemies as tools to proceed through the game is very well implemented. The bizarre humor and quirky cut-scenes work, too. —**CHRIS H.**

BEN 10: ALIEN FORCE (Wii)

> *Obviously, fans of the show will find something to like, but the Wii version of Ben 10: Alien Force is ultimately a mediocre beat-'em-up with repetitive combat and some annoying platforming bits.*
>
> —**JUSTIN C.**

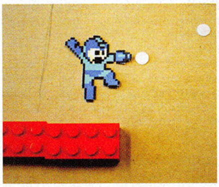
Ethan
What the—!?
(Not this again...)

TIME HOLLOW

As Chris Hoffman mentioned in his review, Time Hollow is short, its "puzzles" barely register, and its ending doesn't satisfy. But Time Hollow's fast-paced story goes in some very unique directions, and builds to a gripping crescendo before it fizzles out. If you're a sci-fi fan looking for something different, grab a copy if you see it cheap. —**CASEY L.**

FANDOM

Man in Motion



Mega Man 9's old-school awesomeness inspires crazy-cool stop-motion animation.

What's as cool as the hardcore challenge and old-school appeal of Mega Man 9 for WiiWare? Not much. But the Mega Man 9-themed video crafted by graphic-design student Nicolas Ménard for his multimedia class at Collège Ahuntsic in Montréal comes awfully close. Created via stop-motion animation, the one-minute video features a paper-cutout Mega Man making his way through levels and hazards constructed from an assortment of everyday objects (including shoes, Game Boy Color cartridges, a paper cutter, and an Oreo cookie); you can check it out at www.vimeo.com/1996344. We recently contacted Nicolas—who's been playing Nintendo games since the NES and Game Boy days—to find out more about what went into making this impressive project. —CHRIS H.

NINTENDO POWER What was the assignment that inspired you to make your Mega Man 9 stop-motion animation video?

NICOLAS MÉNARD The assignment was to make a 15-second animation/publicity spot on a video game for the Nintendo DS. I asked my teacher if I could made something more like a music video for Mega Man 9 on the Wii, since I was having so much fun with that game.

Why did you choose Mega Man 9 as the source material?

Mega Man 9 is a return to old-school gaming, creating an immense sense of nostalgia for everybody who played Mega Man 2 or any other NES Mega Man in their childhood. This concept was very inspiring for me. Also, I wanted to add something to the "sprite animation" genre. So I thought that making paper sprites would be original.

What was the process like creating the project?

The project started with two main ideas: paper sprites and modern controllers switching to old-school controllers with stop-motion. With that in mind, I started to make some paper Mega Mans, chose a song, and created a very sketchy scenario for a one-minute animation. So I took out stuff I had around, created little stages for my paper Mega Man, and took pictures with my brand-new camera. The final step was to make the montage with all those pictures in [animation program] After Effects CS3.

How long did it take for you to make it?

The animation had to be done pretty quickly since I had to hand it in at a certain date, so it took about 20 hours to complete.

What do you think of the response you've received?

Given that the project was initially to practice with After Effects CS3, I'm extremely surprised with the popularity of the project. I think I had a heart attack when I saw all those page views and comments!

What made you choose Concrete Man's theme for the background music?

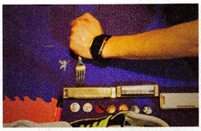
I was searching for a song that would fit my concept, and Concrete Man's theme was the best for what I had in mind. With its fast and catchy beat, just listening to the song was giving me so many ideas.

There are some pretty unusual materials used in the project. How did you decide what materials to use and what do you think some of the strangest ones are?

One word: random. Anything that was lying around was accepted in the composition of the stages. The strangest object is, in my opinion, the Oreo boss. It was initially supposed to be something like a Pasta Man character, but when I saw the Oreo box in my kitchen, there was no more doubt. The USB key platform was pretty weird, too.

Have you beat Mega Man 9 yet?

Sure, a couple of times! I still have to finish the Proto Man run, though.



[Right] The year 200X marked the beginning of the cookie rebellion.

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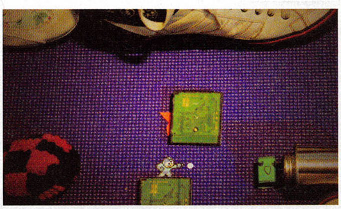
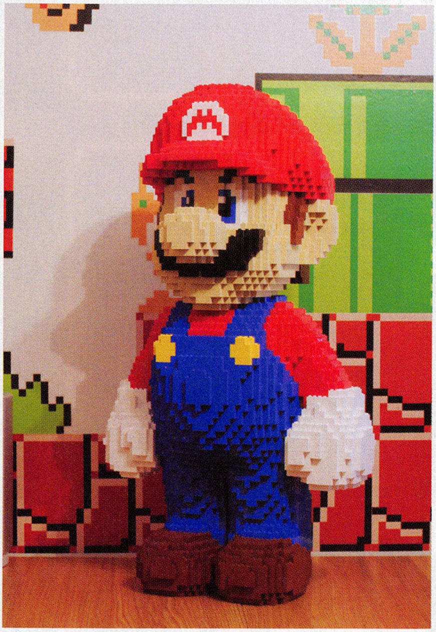




FANDOM

LEGO My Mario

LEGO Star Wars. LEGO Batman. LEGO Mario? Actually, yes—but it's a much more literal adaptation than the video game versions. The wonder pictured here comes to us from Keith Brogan, a 33-year-old 3-D artist from Livingston, Scotland, who typically works in the automotive visualization industry. Brogan came up with a technique in 3-D modeling program Modo that allowed him to create a "pixelated" version of a model using small digital blocks. "It was always at the back of my mind that these 'pixelated' 3-D models could be easily built using LEGO blocks," says Brogan. And so Mario became Brogan's initial subject, due in part to the Nintendo icon's popularity and also his bright color palette, which transferred well to the vibrant bricks.

Rather than create the 3-D model from scratch, Brogan used a NextEngine HD 3-D scanner to scan a five-inch Mario figurine, then scaled the digital model to nearly 30 inches—the size of his LEGO creation—and used his special technique to give it a blocky appearance. Brogan says the computer-modeling process takes only a few hours; it's linking together the LEGO blocks that requires a considerable time investment— an hour or two a night for a couple weeks.

Brogan suspects he used some 15,000 LEGO blocks in the process, which set him back roughly £300—just over $500 U.S. under the current conversion rate. Since he posted the results online, community feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, but Brogan says the model will likely remain in his office to "brighten the place up." Asked if he has plans to create another gaming likeness with LEGOs, Brogan suggests the lengthy process makes it an unlikely prospect. "This was really just a one-off, fun project for me...it's quite a time-intensive hobby and I'm pretty busy with work as it is," he asserts before reconsidering. "Then again, a LEGO Yoshi sidekick would look cool...." **—ANDREW H.**

ABOVE *and* BEYOND

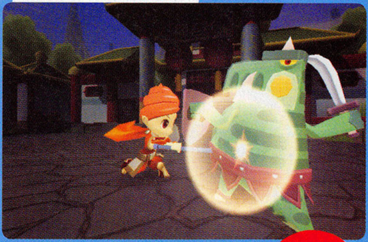
Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 1000 Marina Blvd., Suite 510, Brisbane, CA 94005. We'll run the best stuff in this section.

WRITE YOUR OWN CAPTION

Screen Test

The caption-writing force was strong with the readers—check out some of the better entries for Volume 235's Star Wars: The Force Unleashed screenshot. This month, we have a bit of a giant lizard problem, and we could definitely use your help. Even if your name isn't Turok, send a caption to **screentest@nintendopower.com.**

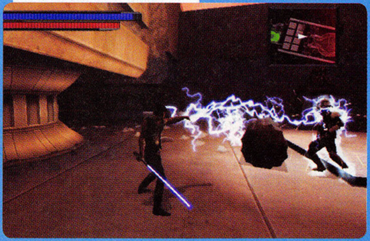
THIS MONTH'S SHOT



Navi—the ultimate distractor.

HERE'S OUR CAPTION. THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?

VOLUME 235'S SHOT



"After years of Pokémon training, Luke Skywalker has finally learned the ways of the Pikachu." **—COLIN T.**

"One thing the Sith have over the Stormtroopers: Lightning Reflexes." **—DERRECK B.**

"Let's see Travis Touchdown do this!" **—FLAME**

"Ooh, Samus is going to be so mad when she finds out you took her Hyper Grapple ability!" **—MITCHELL W.**

"Sure, it took ten days of shuffling on carpet, but the static shock at the end? Totally worth it." **—TOON324**

NP: 238
ATTACK
MAGIC
DEFEND
RPG SPECIAL

FEBRUARY 2009 • VOL. 238

NEXT MONTH

An RPG explosion draws near! We'll go in depth with all the role-playing epics coming to Wii and DS, including Dragon Quest V, Arc Rise Fantasia, Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon, and a few surprises.

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125
409
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Engage in fast-paced real-time battles utilizing the powers of the elements

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Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes

Wii™

Tales 10th ANNIVERSARY

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BANDAI NAMCO Games

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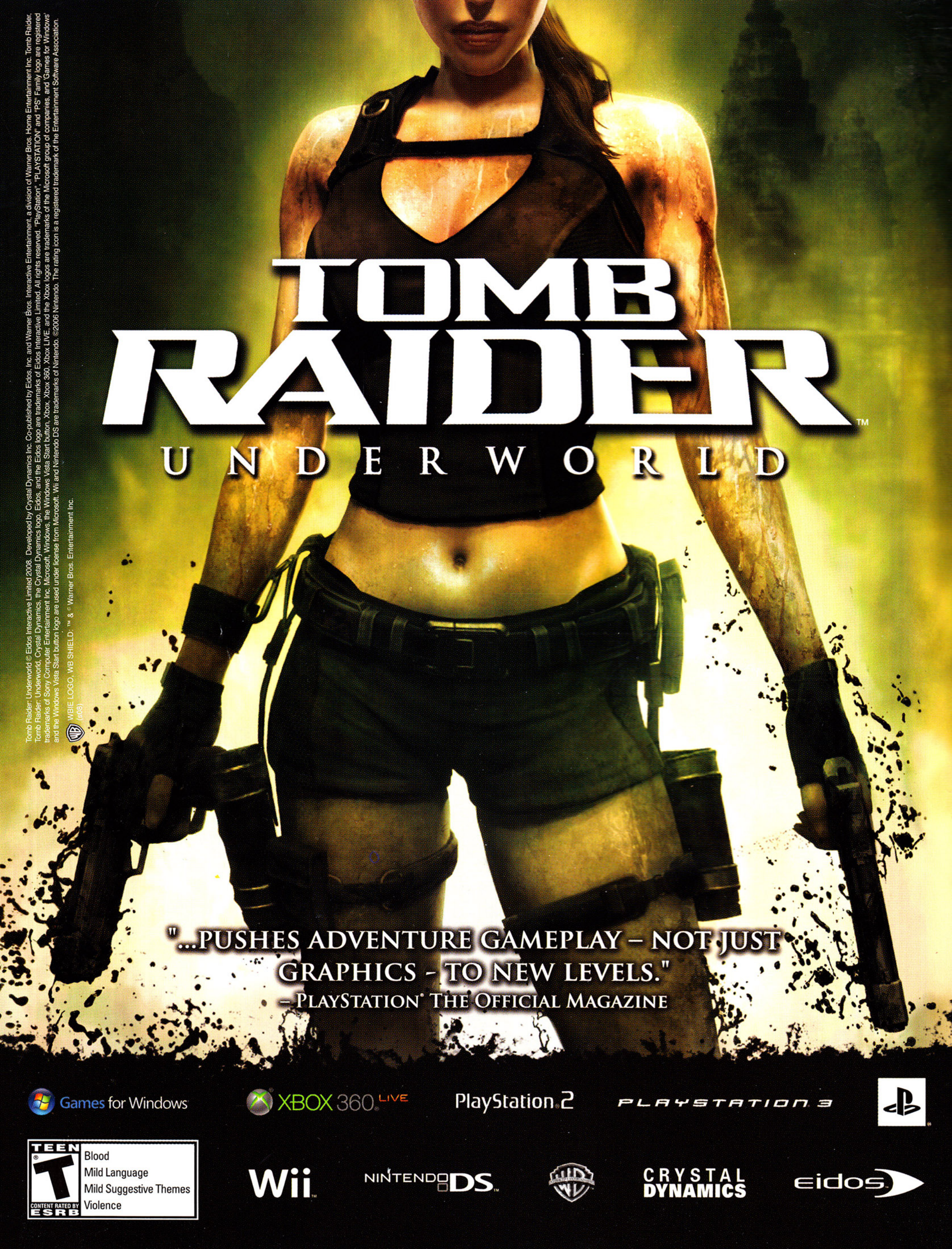
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Blood
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
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Wii
NINTENDO DS
CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
eidos

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